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THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF HISTORY
AND THE MODERN SECULAR AGE

A Thesis

Presented to the General Faculty Council
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Bachelor of Divinity

by
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We, the undersigned, hereby certify that we have read and recommend to the School of Graduate studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF HISTORY AND THE MODERN SECULAR AGE, submitted by Gordon J. Oaks, B.A., in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the Christian concept of history. This concern comes from the existential questions of modern men, including Christians, as to whether history has any meaning.

Traditionally, Christianity has had a definite interpretation of the meaning of history. It is important for Christians to understand the historical stream in which they stand, if they are to understand what the Christian view of history has been and why; and to grapple today with what Christianity has to say to our age and to our struggle for meaning.

For this reason, this thesis will trace briefly the Old and New Testament views of history, with a view to its purpose and goal and man's place in it.

When this Biblical base is laid, we will sketch the development of the thought of the major Christian thinkers up to the modern age and the emphases they stressed in their concepts of Christian history. The men we will look at are Augustine, Luther, Aquinas and Calvin. These men influenced many streams of thought that transformed Christianity and the world's history.

From this point we will examine the development of the idea of progress which permeated so effectively the thinking of the modern period. Its impact on Christian thought was very significant to the development of Christian concepts of history.

The final phase of the thesis will look at three important Christian writers in the field of Christianity and History as they speak and relate to our modern secular society. I feel they represent major schools or streams of thought. Reinhold Niebuhr is an American and one of America's most notable theologians. His experience is on the American scene, which has a different outlook from that of Europe. Rudolf Bultmann is a German Professor Emeritus

of theology at the University of Marburg. He stands among the most eminent and influential theologians of our modern age. Arend Th. van Leeuwen gives the thesis an open dimension to the world and the future. He has only written this one book, but it has been considered an "event." Unlike Niebuhr and Bultmann, van Leeuwen's stance is born of a passionate devotion to the missionary work of the Church in which he was actively engaged for many years. He is a scholar of the highest order, through whom a new "world wind" and concern seems to blow. He has been very influential in the whole Christian-Secular revolution. He is still a young man and no doubt he will be heard from a great deal more.

Two important definitions must be made before we begin the thesis: eschatology and secular. This thesis was stimulated by the gnawing and bewildering presence of traditional Christian eschatology in the Christian concept of history. Eschatology is defined as the doctrine of the last things; that is, the occurrences with which our known world comes to an end. When we speak of history and meaning, eschatology is included by definition. Eschatology is not just about the last things; included are ideas about the future, the goal of history and our place in it. For the sake of this thesis, this broad meaning of eschatology must be remembered. So then, this thesis asks what is the Christian concept of history as it has developed and changed through time and how does Christian eschatology relate to modern secular man. The symbolism and mythological language of eschatology is a real problem for many modern Christians.

The second key word to be defined is "secular." Our age might be termed the age of the "secular explosion." This term "secular" is opposed to the term "sacred." "Sacred" refers to the penetration of the religious ethos of a society or group into every area of people's lives. The point of reference for values and thought of the sacred came from above, from beyond, from another world. The sacred refers to an eternal realm. Man is confronted by a reality beyond his human capacities. The sacred was a realm of grace, not

of nature. In the past, Christianity was closely tied to home, school and political life. This is no longer so. The "secular" is the realm where man's concern is solely with this world and this life. In the secular realm a state of affairs should exist in which no religion or ideology dominates. Man has autonomy in his spheres of thought, which he never could have in the sacred realm. No common sense of the timeless order of reality prevails in this realm. It is temporal and will pass away.

Harvey Cox defines the process of secularization as:

. . . the liberating of man from religious and metaphysical tutelage, the turning of his attention away from other worlds and toward this one.¹

This is to say, man's standard of action comes no longer from an understanding of a realm of values beyond his immediate level of existence but from the natural, physical and cultural processes of his immediate world. The Dutch Theologian, van Puersen says:

It [secularization] is the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed world views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols.²

The world is loosed to replace faith in God's providence with faith in man's cultural creativity. In the secular realm, man creates the values and conditions he lives by. In the process of secularization, one finds a transference of the center of gravity from divine depth to purely human creation.³

The last phrase of van Peursen, "the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols," is the crucial point of necessary contact of the secular view of modern man with Christians and their eschatology. So this thesis asks: What does this Gospel, which Christ said was for all men, have to say today? Is there a contact? Can Christianity speak to the modern secular world and its history?

¹Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 217.

²Cox, The Secular City, p. 2.

³Egbert de Vries, Man in Community: Christian Concern for the Human in Changing Society (New York: Association Press, 1966), p. 335.

CHAPTER I

BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY

Men through the ages have asked the same questions of the meaning of their existence and of history. The Christian faith says, "Life does have meaning and there are things we can say about existence." For the Christian, the roots of this belief are found in the historical and existential experiences, that the Bible, the Old and the New Testaments, relate to our history and lives. This chapter will examine the Biblical basis.

Central to the Christian answer is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. All that he was, all that he stood for and all that he said pointed to meaning and purpose in the universe. Jesus' words and the ethic he proclaimed must be understood in the eschatological and apocalyptic thought of the day for he was a Jew. People believed that the end was imminent. Between the close of the Old Testament writing and Christ, there developed a large body of apocalyptic writing. The concept of a Messiah developed who denoted an eschatological figure. To use the word Messiah was to imply eschatology, the last things. There was going to be an apocalypse, a cataclysmic ending of the world by divine intervention. Jesus was born and raised in the ethos of the Old Testament. To fully understand Jesus we must understand this background.

A. The Old Testament

It is essential then, that we go back to the history of Judaism--the roots of our Christian faith--if we are to understand this crucial concept of eschatology in the New Testament faith. Behind any people in their march in history is a painted backdrop representing their belief as to the future. Eschatology is defined as the concept of "last things." This means, the things

that will happen at the end of history and what it will be like. So, it is tied up with the whole concept of history in which the Jewish people saw themselves. This included their essential belief in Yahweh and the purpose Yahweh had for them as his chosen people.

Amos Wilder speaks of eschatology as myth. He sees it as a form of myth which represents the unknown future. Since man is limited to the here and now he must fall back on an imaginative picture of what preceded the known and what is to follow it.¹ People will likely cheer at this point and say, "Well here is something else we can push aside as myth." This word "myth" has been given such a negative connotation but it still expresses a very valid point if accepted as a "positive imaginative way in which a truth is being conveyed." We are not to think, Wilder points out, that our modern, more enlightened epochs are free of this necessity. Our myth will differ, but our representations of origin and end-time will still have the nature of myth. For example, prophecies of an ideal community or a world-wide communist order are all of the nature of eschatological myth as were those of the millennium. Likewise, the evolutionary view expressed in terms of mutations--successive new creations or alterations of human nature--represents a series of real eschatological ends and renewals.

Wilder adds that this world's greatest myths have always been symbolic representations of essential truths which are subject to the shaping and correction of time and experience. Certain myths represent only a personification of natural phenomena, but others portray the profoundest experience of a people or race. The story of the Fall in Genesis is such a myth. It has a truth as to the origin and nature of moral sense, which is unaffected by later views of social development. Jewish eschatology is such a myth and carries a weight of spiritual truth such as only the greatest art can convey. This section will trace the development of eschatology in Old Testament religion.

¹Amos Wilder, Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Harper Brothers, 1939).

The seed-bed of the Israelite religion of Yahweh was her historical experience. Nothing of her thought can be understood apart from her history. Kaufmann sees the eschatological events that will proclaim the glory of Yahweh to all men being drawn from the popular legends of Judaism's historical experience. Judaism was:

... not an esoteric religion of a spiritual elite like the higher pagan religions but is a growth that is rooted in and nourished by the popular religion of Israel.¹

The early period of the entering and settlement of the promised land had an eschatological quality; ancient promises were being fulfilled. This was "the end of days", the final, permanent bliss. The military success and the settlement gave rise to pride and a sense of well-being. This sentiment is clear in all the ancient and prophetic literature. The blessings of Jacob² and Moses³ give it clear expression and reveal to us the inner consciousness of Israel. The former is the earliest dealing expressly with the "end of days." The latter is similar in pattern but generally felt to be much later. The tribes fight, but are always victorious. They have settled in the promised land and enjoy the bounty of the earth. Yahweh has driven out the enemy and has commanded, "Destroy!" He has given Israel a land of grain and wine, and has settled it in insulated security. Happy Israel! There is none like God, nor any like Israel--a people saved through Yahweh. Her enemies will dwindle away before her and Israel will step on them.⁴

¹Y. Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 133.

²Genesis 49.

³Deuteronomy 33. Scholarship generally feels that this blessing was written long after Moses, probably around 900 B.C.

⁴Deuteronomy 33:26-29.

In the Exodus years of wandering and the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land of Canaan the people saw no possibility that Yahweh would really break his covenant with Israel. They could not seriously contemplate the idea that Yahweh would expel them from the land they had been promised and to which they had been led. There are a few warnings such as those in Numbers 33:55, Joshua 23:13 and Judges 2. They all revolve around Israel's failure to be obedient to God and for not doing what He commanded. They were allowing themselves to be absorbed by the pagan Canaanites. They include the imagery that the Canaanites will drive them off their land.¹

Then came the great golden age of David and Solomon. The glorious monarchy when Israel was great and powerful and wealthy. This period became the point of reference for the future thought of Israel to her past glory which once was and would come again. Literature in written form had its beginning in David's reign and from this historians worked backward. Later on, after the prophets had taught those principles of theocracy which we have come to call "Deuteronomic",

... the historical books were edited in the light of moral retribution, and at last the Pentateuch was co-ordinated to bring out the selective Providence of God in relation to His chosen people, and history, from being as at first descriptive became didactic [teaching].²

¹There is a problem here with establishing exact dates and the historical accuracy of Numbers, Joshua and Judges. These books were put together by editors using different sources: J, E, P, and D. Numbers was part of the "P" [Pentateuch] strain, while Joshua and Judges are compiled by the "D" or Deuteronomic School. Kaufmann dates these works much earlier than most scholars. The importance of these passages for our view, of the development of the Jewish eschatology, is still conveyed by the expression of the attitude of the editors. The Exile was not unnaturally explained by these later writers as a fulfillment of punishments of which the Hebrews had been warned before they entered Canaan. For further information see the Abingdon Bible Commentary.

²H. Wheeler Robinson, The History of Israel (London, Duckworth, 1938), p. 223.

In the terrible century between the reigns of Ahab and Jeroboam II, 869-745 B.C., through the dynasties of Omri and Jehu, a significant change took place in the mood of the people.¹ The Omri dynasty was a prosperous one. Jehu wiped it out with the blood bath of Ahab's house and his seventy sons.² Elijah, through his fierce opposition to Ahab and Jezebel, set in motion forces which were to overthrow the Omri dynasty by revolution. Elisha, his successor, commissioned one of the prophetic band to seek out Jehu, the army commander, and anoint him King of Israel.³ Though Jehu eradicated Baalism, peace and an end to the suffering did not occur as the people expected. "Why?" they asked!

The incessant Aramean wars ravaged and impoverished the land. With them came famine and plague. To the religiously sensitive, it seemed as if Yahweh was withdrawing his favor⁴ and as if a turning point in Israel's destiny had been reached. The mood was certainly affected in the last creations of early prophetic literature.

The Deuteronomic School provides for us from its sources, our only reliable view of the rise and fall of Israel from Moses' time to its own. Scholarship places Deuteronomic Code around 650 B.C. and sees it as Josiah's law book. These writers, from their sources and interpretation, see Israel's coming into rest and certainty of their future, as no longer assured. The threats and curses in Deuteronomy had become real and would become real.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day,
that ye shall soon perish from off the land whereunto ye
go over Jordan to possess it ...⁵

¹B. W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1957).

²II Kings 10.

³II Kings 9.

⁴See Amos 4:6, Isaiah 1:5.

⁵Deuteronomy 4:26.

... and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant ...¹ Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day.

The scheme of these chapters and others, is that Israel grows old, fat and secure, and violates the covenant. Yahweh then hides his face and brings on the doom.

The famous Song of Moses² speaks of Israel's enslavement to a foolish nation in addition to drought, famine, plague and so on. After this chastisement though, God will have compassion on His people. The contents raise a question as to the date of its composition. It is evidently addressed to a nation after sufficient time had elapsed for Israel to become prosperous, fall into idolatry, and to arrive at the verge of national ruin. Israel's prosperity and faithlessness are spoken of as having occurred in the past. This psalm, most scholars seem to feel was not written by Moses himself, but was an interpretation to Israel in Palestine of the Mosaic teaching. Exile is not mentioned here, but in the warnings of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 4:25-28, exile appears as the final calamity. Among the nations Israel will find no peace. Continual affliction, however, will purify Israel, she will repent and God will recall the covenant and restore the land.

The warnings show the radical change that took place in Israel's eschatology. Where earlier times believed that they were experiencing the fulfillment of the ancient promises, these writings reflect an age that saw itself living in an age of Yahweh's wrath, for he had "hidden his face." Only a new act of divine grace could save Israel. The hope for a new eschatological restoration to God's favor was born. The "end of the days" was transferred from the present to the future.

Through the period of Elijah the idea glimmers forth that religious faith, not national existence, is the ultimate value.

¹Deuteronomy 31:16,17.

²Deuteronomy 32.

Israel has value insofar as she is Yahweh's people. Yahweh is "the God", not a symbolic extension of the national being of Israel. If Israel does not fulfill its duty to Yahweh, Israelite prophecy demands, even invites its punishment. This idea underlies the emerging eschatology of this period. In the crucible of affliction, sinful Israel will perish; for the purified, the new era of "the end of days" will emerge.

Several of the main features of later prophetic eschatology are present in Elijah's visions.¹ Aram is Yahweh's "rod of anger", as is Assyria in the Isaianic emphasis.² The prophetic notion of the remnant makes its appearance in the form of "the seven thousand" who will be saved by Yahweh. Jehu is evidently conceived of as a prototypical Messiah--the king anointed by Yahweh through his prophet--in whose time Israel will be redeemed. The main lines of later eschatology are found here in a northern kingdom setting--sin and wrath, a ravaging enemy, the remnant and the ideal king. In the south, such visions centered always about the house of David. This was the reason for attaching such importance to the Davidic line.

In these times, too, the concept of "the day of the Yahweh" mentioned by Amos³ took shape. The puzzlement and disappointment in Israel's continued suffering was resolved in expectation of a day when Yahweh would wreak vengeance upon Israel's enemies. This expectation was not only shared by popular religion and the patriotic "false prophets", but it was an integral part of all the great prophecies of warning.⁴

¹I Kings 17 - II Kings 2.

²Isaiah 10:5.

³Amos 5:10 ff.

⁴Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel, p. 281. This view of Kaufmann is open to dispute as many scholars feel Amos was miles ahead of popular religion or חַיִּי יְהוָה. Amos reversed the popular concept about the Day being Israel's day of fulfillment to stressing that it was Yahweh's day. Amos 3:2 brings out that God's people stand under God's judgment too along with everyone else. The canonical prophets so ran against popular religious thought. See page 15 of thesis.

For two and a half centuries Assyria ruled the Mesopotamian world and Judah was subservient. That period ended in 626 B.C. with the death of the last and greatest of the war lords, Ashur-bani-pal. Josiah could revive national worship because Judah was preserved as a kingdom. This was not so in the North however, for there was no native Israelite king and on that basis alone no chance for a revival.¹ The general breakup of the Assyrian Empire gave kings of small independent countries a temporary freedom they longed for. The Deuteronomic reformation under Josiah occurred five years after the death of Ashur-bani-pal. The Book of Deuteronomy was found in the Temple during the renovation in 621.

This glimmer of a hope was short lived for the political situation continued to be rocky. Pressure was felt from Egypt and Babylon. Jeremiah (c. 600) rose to prophesy doom if Judah revolted against Babylonian influence. They were saved once in 597 by heeding Jeremiah's words. However, Zedekiah would not listen and revolted. The Babylonians came in strength in 586 B.C. and sacked the city. They destroyed the Temple, took Zedekiah captive, put out his eyes and deported many people. Thus Judah suffered the same fate that Israel had from the Assyrians in 722. There ceased to be any king in Judah from 586 on.

Here of course is a crucial event to Jewish eschatology. God's people had been suffering for years. Army after army rolled over them. The searing words of the prophets of the judgment of God on Israel's sin and disobedience had come true. Now this! The Temple destroyed, the people dispersed across the Empire! Exiles again in foreign land! Why? Was there no hope? Were they utterly cut off? Where was history going?

In 550 B.C. Cyrus appeared on the scene. Soon he was in control of the Persian and Median Empire. This was the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire destined to become the greatest empire the world had hitherto known. It lasted for two hundred

¹Norman H. Snaith, The Jews from Cyrus to Herod (Wallington, Surrey: The Religious Education Press, 1949), p. 8.

years and was stronger and more firmly established than Babylon had ever been. Babylon fell to Cyrus in 538. Cyrus reversed the usual policy of repression and gave all deportees the chance to return home. He encouraged revival of national worship and recreation of the homeland. Under Darius the Temple at Jerusalem was rebuilt 520-516.

Nehemiah was sent by Artaxerxes I to Jerusalem as governor in 444 to rebuild the city walls. A separatist policy was developing in post-exilic Judaism. Ezra carried on Nehemiah's work. At his death Judaism was established distinct and exclusive.

The claim appears that only those who went into exile and returned were the People of God. They spurned the "people of the land" who did not go into exile, by separating themselves and acting accordingly as "the People of God." "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God."¹ Ezekiel² and Jeremiah³ thought of the exiles of 597 as the nucleus of the people of God.

Those who returned from the Babylonian Exile were sure of three things. These were determining factors in the subsequent development of Judaism. Firstly, they were sure there was one God. There was none other than He. He was supreme in wisdom and power. Secondly, they were sure that they, and they alone were the chosen people of this one and only God. They were the true Israel. Thirdly, they were sure that this one God would see to it that they, His chosen people, would accomplish a glorious destiny at the head of the nations.

Monotheism springs full and clear in the Second Isaiah. This was essential before a full eschatology could arise. The above three themes are set forth in Isaiah 40-55. Cyrus was received as the anointed one of "Jehovah" for the special purpose of setting God's people free.

¹Ezra 4:1-3.

²Jeremiah 31:31 ff.

³Ezekiel 37:11.

The exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem were supremely confident in a glorious destiny. They had known trials and anguish during their exile. They had reached the lowest depths of despair. "Surely their suffering had purified them," they felt. "Surely God would again lift them up and make them great." They had to have some hope, some "raison d'etre."

The picture of a glowing future is found again and again in Isaiah.¹ In Isaiah 53 the Servant "had suffered" is the purport because the suffering was in the past. It was a preliminary to a glorious triumph. This is the burden of the prophet's message as a whole. The Second Isaiah is the main prophet of Israel's eschatological thought that quickly and voluminously expanded from the exile on. He is the prophet of the Restoration. Israel is to be comforted for there is to be an end of sorrow. The message is one of good tidings to Jerusalem² and all the might of the God who made heaven and earth is at work to ensure that His promises will be fulfilled. Israel's enemies will be cleared away and Nature herself will be transformed to make all clear for the victory of God's people.

More and more the message of the prophet unfolds itself, and triumph grows and spreads, until the exaltation of Chapter 52 and parts of Chapter 54 are reached. In Chapter 54 the belief is explicit that all Israel's troubles were but momentary. Now that she is about to be restored, Yahweh's mercies will never leave her again. The mountains and hills will first be moved, so enduring will be God's continued mercies to His people.

Post-exilic expectation is therefore once more full of those glowing hopes which belonged to popular thought of the eighth century when Amos and his contemporaries were active.

¹Isaiah 40-55.

²Isaiah 40:9-11.

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.... They shall see the glory of the Lord, the excelling of our God.¹

Under the influence of this new confidence interpolations found their way into the writing of the earlier prophets since their wholesale condemnation now needed qualification. Such interpolations are Hosea 1:10,11; Amos 9:5-15; Isaiah 30:19-26, etc.

Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together...and appoint themselves one head and they shall come up out of the land for great shall be the day of Jezreel.²

With all this in their hearts the exiles came back to Jerusalem seeking to restore the ruins and build the glorious city of their future. The three points mentioned earlier of the post-exilic belief must never be forgotten if these people and their eschatology are to be understood. The undying certainty of their hopes enabled them to maintain their faith in the midst of all disappointments and disasters, even to the extent of maintaining that heaven and earth would be reborn on their behalf. Wheeler Robinson points out that it is the psychical factor of the faith of Judaism that transforms all those events that seemed to contradict any ideas of divine action on behalf of Israel. The Babylonian captivity is a prime example for it was interpreted by faith:

...as God's victory over sin and sorrow and death, the three shadows cast on time by eternity.³

The story of post-exilic Jewry is the story of dreams that faded one after another, dreams that never materialized except in fitful promise. This was the history of three and a half centuries without intermission. There was brief hope in the Maccabees

¹Isaiah 35 ff.

²Hosea 1:11.

³Robinson, The History of Israel, p. 224.

in the second century. Internal factions and strife broke up any attempts at unity. Each faction appealed for foreign help against the other and so the glory of Jewry faded. The people began to conclude that not of this world was the promised glory to come. This was a significant switch of emphasis for eschatology to another realm. With this thinking developing it is a short step from eschatology to apocalyptic stress on a sudden great ending.

Out of the general hope of a better fortune there arose the hope of an especially great "Day of the Lord" when the fallen fortunes of Israel would be established firmly for ever. It would be useful to trace the development of this concept at this point.

This idea was already established in the time of Amos (c.750) for he makes it his job to knock from Israel's mind their easy optimism. They expected that the "Day of the Lord" would be for them a day of fulfillment. They looked forward to it with anticipation and longing. To the pre-exilic prophet Amos, the "Day of the Lord" was by no means a day of joy.¹ The same picture is given in Isaiah 2:6-21. The loftiness of man would be bowed down. The Day was one of exaltation of God alone. None but the righteous who did God's will could hope to stand in that day.

Jeremiah clarifies the issue further. He too is full of condemnation but as the years pass his condemnation is reserved for those who remained behind in Jerusalem after the deportation of 597 B.C. They were the bad figs. The good figs in exile were being prepared for repentance.² This estimation of exiled Israel as righteous is carried into the writings of Second Isaiah and Ezekiel. The result is that post-exilic Israel, being now conscious of its righteousness can once more look forward with hope to the "Day of the Lord."

The "Day of the Lord" concept develops through Zephaniah,³

¹Amos 5:18.

²Jeremiah 24:7.

³Zephaniah 1:7-18.

Isaiah,¹ Joel,² and so on, each one getting more fierce, vivid, and darker. It was to be a terribly fierce day of Yahweh's anger when there would be a deep, bloody darkness, the earth would shake, wonders in the heavens, eclipse, pillars of smoke and much fire. The full picture can be seen in the first century A.D. work, The Assumption of Moses. Matthew 24:29 gives a reflection of this "Day."

In the eschatological and apocalyptic thought of Judaism, the Persian (Iranian) influence of Zoroastrianism can be seen. This great Persian religion was founded around 600 B.C. It is very probable that the Israelites were exposed to it during the exile and adopted some of their ideas. The greatest Zoroastrian influence is to be found in the conception of successive ages of the world.

The Persian conception of the whole scheme of things envisages four world periods or ages, each of three thousand years in duration. In the first age the creation was entirely spiritual and invisible. From before the beginning there were two spirits: Ahura Mazda, the good spirit; and Angra Mainyu, the spirit of evil. When Angra Mainyu saw the light of this first creation he sought by every means to defeat the good spirit. All the efforts which he made were unavailing during the second age of three thousand years. They were the years of Blessedness, a veritable Golden Age. But in the third period of three thousand years the evil spirit gained an ascendancy and created every kind of evil thing, including a hundred thousand diseases save one. At the end of this period Zorathustra, in the Greek, Zoroaster, appears and the victory of Ahura Mazda begins.

At the end of each one thousand years of this period a deliverer, Shaoshyant, appears, born of the line of Zoroaster, though earlier traditions suggest that this Shaoshyant is always Zoroaster himself. At last comes the great consummation when

¹Isaiah 13.

²Joel 2:2.

Angra Mainyu is cast into the abyss of Mazda and the end of the world takes place. Then the dead will be raised and all men will be judged. A purifying Fire will purge everybody and everything. All will finally be saved and a new age will begin with new heavens and a new earth. All will be happiness and there will be no evil nor pain nor sorrow.

The Jews were looking during all the centuries for a glorious Age that never came. Time and time again they hoped for some change in the balance of power that would give them the opportunity to fulfill their glorious destiny as the People of God. The Persian eschatology sketched above provided a solution for a people who were being slowly driven to the realization that this present world held nothing for them but blood and tears and humiliation. The Persian doctrine told them that this was the Age when wickedness triumphed and the power of evil was supreme. But it told them also that when this Age was past, the New Age would begin. Then, in that time, the people of God would realize the blessings which had so long been denied to them.

The first influence of Persian eschatology is found in the early apocalypse Isaiah 24-27. This dates from the third century B.C.¹ It speaks of the emptying and spilling out of the inhabitants of a world turned upside-down, Isaiah 24:1, to be followed by a burning of them all so that only a few are left, Isaiah 24:6. The judgment was against "the high ones on high," and the throwing down of the kings of the earth who exercised dominion over their subjects including the Jews. It is far from the full eschatological scheme but there is enough imagery to show that the Persian scheme is known. So also Isaiah 65:17 shows traces of a knowledge of the Iranian scheme of Creation, Redemption and Fulfillment.

The second century B.C. saw a great revival of Jewish hopes and with it an increased use of Iranian eschatology. This connection with Persian eschatology can be seen in the Book of Daniel from this period. The restoration of worship in December 165 B.C.

¹Snaith, The Jews from Cyrus to Herod, p. 96.

was thus visualized as the End of the Time, the three and a half years of the Book of Daniel. The New Age had begun. The period of the apocalypses followed the decline of the Hasmonaean glory, telling of that which was shortly to come to pass. They purport to contain secrets long hidden, but now revealed for the edification and salvation of those who are living in the last days. Everything is vivid and urgent.

Dr. R. H. Charles argues that while the great prophets dealt with the destinies of this nation or that, they took no comprehensive view of history as a whole.

Daniel was the first to teach the unity of all human history and that every fresh phase of this history was a further stage in the development of God's purposes.¹

Yet it is to the prophets the Book of Daniel owes its comprehensive vision of divine purpose, extending beyond the borders of Israel and subduing the other nations to that purpose.

To all of the Biblical writers, history was moving swiftly towards a great climax and the birth of a new age which should belong to the faithful remnant of Israel. From this it was but a short step to the treatment of these themes by the apocalyptists.²

Whereas the prophets believed in divine initiative and control in all history, the apocalyptists seem to reserve God's action for the great final act of history. At least their supreme interest is the great final act of history. The apocalyptists, unlike the prophets in their eschatological view, saw all the course of human history merely from the human side, as a record of human lust for power and oppression and ruthlessness. In the last act of divine initiative God would not use man.

At this point a brief differentiation between apocalyptic and eschatological thought is necessary. F. C. Grant provides a

¹Robinson, The History of Israel, p. 234.

²H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of the Apocalyptic (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955). p. 25.

good basis for understanding. These two terms cannot be used interchangeably. All Hebrew, Jewish and early Christian religious thought was "eschatological" with the exception of such unusual writings as Ecclesiastes and a few passages in the Wisdom literature. In contrast with the age-old classical or pagan view of time and history, with its cycles of recurrence or even without recurrence, with nothing more than endless duration in an unchanging universe; the Hebrew and Jewish conception took it for granted that eventually the will of God must prevail, and therefore the evils in the world must come to an end. This teleological or purposeful pattern of thought is taken for granted not only by the prophets but also by psalmists, the wise men, and the scribes. For the Hebrew, the Jew, and for the early Christian, the profoundest of all truths is that God is working out His purposes, and if one looks deeply enough into the present he can see even now the signs of God's activity. This "eschatological" framework or pattern of religious thought was taken for granted by the "apocalyptic" which goes beyond it and produces (or assumes) a world view and a type of religious belief and practice. Apocalyptic is distinguished from prophecy by:

1. A mood of far greater strain and tension, due to persecution or present peril or uncertainty and pessimism over the future.
2. Apocalyptic represents the complete abandonment of human means and wisdom; the complete and exclusive reliance upon a supernatural salvation. Prophecy tended in this direction, but it still required self-help on man's part.
3. The background of human struggle and of the drama of redemption is cosmic, heavenly, angelic, supernatural, rather than political and historical. For example, the Judgment will be individual, not just the punishment of oppressing nations.
4. The list of "dramatis personae" of the divine theodicy, and of the coming redemption, includes transcendent figures not usually reckoned with in prophecy; the Son of Man, angels, Satan, and others. The properties also include things not usually found in prophecy: the New Jerusalem, the heavenly temple and so on.
5. Absolute monotheism is somewhat modified in the direction of polytheism. Other divine personages enter the scene.

For example, the Son of Man at first a symbol but later viewed as a person.

6. In apocalyptic, more emphasis is placed upon the remoteness and transcendence of God.
7. Visions, dreams, apparitions, heavenly voices are more common as modes of communication than in prophecy. Visions are written down in apocalyptic, not related orally. Some of the visions were supposed to be "sealed" and kept secret or hidden until the time of fulfillment drew near.
8. Apocalyptic prediction of the future is explicit, and unconditional with no attention paid to human factors, no "if" or "unless". On the other hand, the tone and formula of prophecy is always "Unless (or if) you repent . . ."¹ Prophecy leaves the future open. God is free to act, and men may possibly repent.
9. Apocalyptists took the ancient prophets literally and very seriously and fitted every detail into a rigid system of history, making constant use of vivid imagination and constant symbolism.²

Apocalyptic literature had its greatest vogue between the years 200 B.C. and A.D. 150, at a time when the lives of men were lived in the midst of religious persecution, national suffering and threatened disaster. About thirty apocalypses belonging to this period of upheaval are known, of which the most important are the Book of Daniel, the fourth Book of Esdras, Enoch, and the Book of the Revelation.

In the strict sense of the phrase, Israel had no philosophy of history, Robinson feels.

She never learned to think in abstract and generalizing ways either of God or of man, or of that history which recorded their relations to each other. Nevertheless, Israel has made a unique contribution to the philosophy of history by the intrinsic qualities of her historical life.³

¹Luke 13:3,5.

²F. C. Grant, Ancient Judaism and the New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p. 85-92.

³Robinson, History of Israel, p. 223.

To Israel God was a reality in the arena of the earth and active in her history. The reality of God was conceived as a sort of super-human temporality which closely linked the temporal and the eternal. It is impossible for man to stand outside his own history and values and evaluate himself. If God is active in human history the evidence of His presence must be in the activity itself. From the activity and so from God our ultimate standards of value are derived. This was certainly the line of action through which Israel developed her historical view and values.

Robinson sees the concept of evolution replaced in Israel's growth by the ideas grouped as "eschatology." There is no seed of inevitable progress and no guarantee of it in the nature of things. Israel's hope is in her God and the New Jerusalem comes from above but is built on earth. The unity of history is found not in man but in the purpose of God who will ultimately establish His Kingdom, from outside. This eschatology, it must be noted, is not an "other-worldly" dualism, which condemns and rejects the life of time, but a coming forth of its best with an elimination of its worst. For the Jew here alone on this earth was meaning. Here God dealt with them, here He would fulfill His purposes, here He would come. In this sense we can say history and eschatology must be one.

If the unity of human history is to be found in God, it is not necessarily irrational to conceive that history will have an end, as it had a beginning, even though its eternal significance passes beyond all the temporal features of a beginning and an end. Maybe the eternal is to be conceived in terms of purposes of God. If so, Israel has given us the most emphatic demonstration of eternity in terms of time and the ultimate unity of history in the purpose of God.¹

From this sweep of the Old Testament we can thus begin to piece together the picture puzzle of our Christian heritage. It is a confusing picture of the history of a people that walked the mountain peaks and travelled in the dark valleys. It is a motley

¹Robinson, The History of Israel, p. 236.

history and provides an excellent sociological example of the effect of environment in shaping a people's history and thought. This can be disturbing and could lead some to reject Judaism and its beliefs as strictly relative to the times but meaningless really. An important point is that their belief in history, though frustrated and often confused by what happened to them, has a constant strand that runs throughout. They questioned what was happening but constantly believed in the purposeful movement of history. Yahweh was their God and there was a purpose in his action. Nothing could ever change that. Their faith was one of hope--a hope that they had a rendezvous with destiny.

It is with all these developments in mind that we look at Jesus Christ. In Christian eschatology, the Messiah became the central figure in the expectation of the last time. Mowinckel unfolds the idea that the Messianic idea is in its strict sense bound up with the future hope and eschatology of Israel and Judaism. An eschatology without a Messiah is conceivable, but not a Messiah apart from a future hope.¹ All these things must be kept in mind when the eschatology of the New Testament is examined.

Man's view of history is extremely important as it influences largely the way he lives his life and what he does with it. It seems evident that the Jews had their finger on a crucial truth of life, though what to do with it and how to interpret this truth baffled them. This is God's world and it was created for a purpose. The human suffering, intrigue and strife in life must somehow be understood. The Israelites understood it in the context of the realization of the divine goal and the divine nature of God. There is some abiding worth in their faith that the God whose hand we may find in all history will supremely reveal Himself in the goal of history, in fact so reveal Himself that all other revelations of Himself will appear very dim beside it.

¹S. Mowinckel, He That Cometh (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), p. 8.

B. The New Testament

Then Jesus went to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went as usual to the meeting house. He stood up to read the scriptures and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.
 He has anointed me to preach the Good News to the poor,
 He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives,
 And recovery of sight to the blind,
 To set free the oppressed,
 To announce the year when the Lord will save his people!
 He began speaking to them, "This passage of scripture
 has come true today as you heard it being read."¹

Here in a nutshell is the binding cord from the Old to the New Testament. We are confronted directly by Jewish eschatology in the teachings of Jesus. Jewish eschatology went in several directions during the apocalyptic inter-testament period. Jewish eschatology was never really a "system" for it was marked by variety. That there was a strong messianic hope cannot be denied. The sectarians of Qumran had this hope as the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate. The Pharisees had a strong messianic hope. It was an outstanding belief that the anointed of the Lord would come and lead "the people of God" to their promised triumph and glorious kingdom. The New Testament Jews saw in Christ such a deliverer. Men argue today whether Jesus ever actually proclaimed himself as Messiah. Our opening quotation implies such a claim but it is only an implication. Jesus' Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem and his cleansing of the Temple are seen by some as open proclamations of his Messiahship.

Christ asked of Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" This was the crucial question. "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Peter replied.²

¹Luke 4:16-21. (T.E.V.) The R.S.V. is used for the remainder of this New Testament section.

²Mark 8:27 and Luke 9:18-21 concur with Matthew 16:16 in this incident.

"Christ" is the English form of the Greek verbal adjective "Christos," "Anointed." This is used to translate the Hebrew participle "mashiach" which has the same meaning. This Hebrew word was then taken into Greek as "messeas" and so from this is derived the English form Messiah.¹ Jesus was pleased with Peter's answer and told Peter that God had revealed this to him. He warned them to tell no one that he was the Christ, the Messiah.

The actual term "the Messiah" with its full eschatological meaning is not found in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament only in John 1:41 and 4:25, but it is fairly common in post-Old Testament literature. There it always means the glorious future king of Israel in the Age to Come. Oral tradition was always as strong if not stronger than written tradition.

To his followers Jesus was the promised one of Jewish hope. Whatever may have happened during Jesus' life, he was for his followers the embodiment of the coming Kingdom. He proclaimed its law by words; he gave a fore-taste of its power by his healings; he inaugurated the new age.²

F. C. Grant feels that when one looks at the home life of Jesus, his training and the influence of his pious Jewish parents, it is perfectly natural and all but inevitable that Jesus, as far as he can be described in psychological terms, should become the person he was. It was the most natural and inevitable surroundings for the One whom God Himself had sent to His people and all mankind. For there was no religious piety in the whole ancient world to equal that of the Jewish home, no religion to match Judaism for its devotion, earnestness, self-abnegation and loyalty.

Some writers and pious thinkers have tried to compute "the time of the end" mathematically, assuming that history advances by a pre-determined schedule of successive ages, ever moving to-

¹C. Richardson, Theological Wordbook of the Bible.

²Martin Dibelius, Sermon on the Mount (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), p. 79-103.

ward the climax which God has set as its goal. On the other hand, certain writers insisted that such attempts at calculation were incompatible with trust in God. They therefore taught that men must humbly acknowledge their ignorance and wait patiently for God to act. The teaching of Jesus and the New Testament as a whole support this latter view.

This marks the difference between apocalyptic writing and prophetic or eschatological writing. Apocalyptic writing based on the eschatology of Hebrews built up an elaborate system through symbols to predict exactly the "time of the end."¹

A look at the parallel sections in the Gospels on the "Discourse of the Last Things" shows the thinking of the Gospel writers and of Jesus. These discourses begin at Mark 13:1, Matthew 24:1, and Luke 21:5. The Synoptics cite Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple. Talking together the disciples asked Jesus what would be the signs of Jesus' coming and the end of the world. Jesus warned them to, "Take heed that no man lead you astray."² Many things will happen; there will be false Christs, wars, rumors, floods, earthquakes and general chaos. The disciples would be persecuted for Christ's sake. But the ones who can endure to the end will be saved. The apocalyptic influence becomes most evident in the section on the "abomination of desolation" which was written about first in the Book of Daniel.³

The following section concerning the coming of the Son of Man sounds just like the prophetic talk of the "Day of the Lord" concept that developed through Zephaniah 1:7-18, Isaiah 13, Joel 2:2, and so on. Now, when all these things come to pass, you will know that God is nigh, Jesus said. This generation will not all pass away until these things are accomplished. Jesus' next words

¹C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1959), p. 68.

²Mark 13:5.

³See the parallel sections in Matthew 24:15-28, Mark 13:14-23, and Luke 21:20-24 and in Daniel 7:13, 12:1 etc.

are the most significant. Jesus was speaking as a Jew about the historical, traditional beliefs of his people. Then he adds, "But of that day, or that hour, no one knows but the Father."¹

This certainly seems to be the theme of Jesus' eschatology. "Be faithful, watch and pray, be ready for God's coming." It is like a faithful servant being ready for the master's return (Matt. 13:34). Jesus thought the end would be soon but he did leave this open to question and completely in God's hands.

Never in the Synoptic Gospels and rarely in John does Jesus designate himself "Son of God." "Son of God" denotes in the Old Testament the reigning king as God's vice-regent on earth. Jesus speaks of himself as "the Son of Man." (Matt. 16:13). This indicates that everywhere he interprets his messianic office through the channel of that unbroken and unique filial consciousness which was at all times open and obedient to the will of the Father. It was startlingly new that the Messiah should be a free agent with power to interpret his vocation and determine the use he is to make of his messianic power. It was revolutionary that the Messiah should interpret his vocation as a call to submit to baptism and to end his career with a shameful death. The traditional Messiah was never conceived as a divine being. He does not teach but judges and rules.

The sense of Messianic kingship is apparent in many of the sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. It appears as an awareness that in all his ministry of deed and word he represents before men a cause which is described as "the Kingdom of God." All that prophets and men of ages past had yearned to see is manifested in this one personality. Here the hopes of all the years and the final purpose of God for all the world should centre. This is Jesus' claim to transcendent greatness. Men are made to feel that this is a cause toward which there can be no neutrality. "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30).

¹Mark 24:32, Matt. 13:36.

Jesus had, no doubt, to displace in the minds of his disciples and others, nationalistic and materialistic conceptions of the expected messianic kingdom, in order to make room for his own. Certainly the "Suffering Servant" concept in Isaiah is different from the traditional kingly Messiah of the Jews.¹

Resistance to the eschatological way of interpreting Jesus' teaching has continued through Christian history. This ascription of eschatological expectations to Jesus has been obnoxious to the liberal, who desires to make Jesus immediately useful without reference to the apostolic message about him and also to the devout, who is unwilling to accept Jesus' unfulfilled expectations. Hence there have been many attempts to ascribe the apocalyptic eschatology of the Gospels to the early church.²

Certainly in some cases the early church has read into Jesus its own eschatological expectations. But this criticism can only be made with caution and in certain cases. Generally, scholars today maintain that Jesus as a Jew of his time expected an eschatological drama.

New Testament eschatology is centered around the crucial concept in Jesus' eschatology: the Kingdom of God. The parables of the sower, weeds, mustard seed, leaven and the treasure in the field were intended to teach about the Kingdom of God. Rudolf Bultmann's work stands high in this area of eschatology. He points out the naturalness with which Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God as at the Last Supper when he spoke of eating and drinking in the Kingdom of God. Jesus neither depicts the punishments of hell nor paints pictures of heavenly glory. The oracular, esoteric note is completely lacking in the few prophecies of the future which can be ascribed to him with any probability.³

¹R. H. Strachan, "The Gospel in the New Testament," Interpreter's Bible, vol 7 (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), pp. 15,16.

²C. T. Craig, "The Teaching of Jesus," Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), p. 152.

³Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus and the Word (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), p. 35-45.

In fact he absolutely repudiates all representation of the Kingdom which human imagination can create when he says:

When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven.¹

In other words men are forbidden to make any picture of the future life. Jesus thus rejects, says Bultmann, the whole content of apocalyptic speculation as he rejects also the calculation of the time and the watching for signs.

Bultmann feels that the real significance of the Kingdom of God for the message of Jesus does not in any sense depend on the dramatic events attending its coming, nor any circumstances which the imagination can conceive. It interests him not at all as a describable existence but rather as the transcendent event which signifies for man the ultimate "either-or" which constrains him to decision. The meaning of this decision becomes clearer when it is considered further how Jesus' message of the Kingdom is related to the Jewish eschatological hopes. The deliverance of the Kingdom was to be for the Jews for it was a Jewish kingdom where Jews were favored and where the king was of the Davidic tradition of greatness. From Jesus none of these things are heard. Why, he even told people to pay to Caesar what is due to him and to God what belongs to God (Mark 12:13-17)!

Bultmann uses a very vivid illustration to compare the different note Jesus struck from the traditional Jewish eschatology. The Jewish Prayer called the Eighteen Benedictions goes as follows:

Look upon our need and guide our warfare
and redeem us for Thy name's sake.
Deliver us, O Lord, our God, from the pain of our hearts
and bring healing to our wounds.
Sound a great trumpet for our freedom and raise
the standard to bring back our exiles.
Bring back our judges as at the first
and our counsellors as at the beginning.
Give no hope for the apostates,
and bring quickly to nought the kingdom of violence.

¹Mark 12:25 (R.S.V.).

Have mercy, O Lord our God, on Jerusalem, Thy city
and on Zion where Thy glory dwells, and on the kingdom
of the house of David, the Messiah of Thy righteousness.

The circle of Jesus' followers however were given the simplicity
of the Lord's Prayer:

Father, Hallowed be Thy name;
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done
as in Heaven, so on earth.¹

The significance of Jesus' eschatological message for Bultmann is that man now stands under the necessity of decision. The message of the coming of the Kingdom and the will of God point to the present moment as the final hour.

Another crucial thought from Bultmann has real bearing on the direction of this thesis. As modern man struggles for meaning in the "Technopolis" and the world of science and technology, the Christian looks at his faith and the New Testament and searches for hope. The New Testament eschatology was based on this same struggle for meaning by men. The problems were different but man's situation as a finite child of God in an evil world was the same. The New and Old Testament writers expressed a knowledge of the finiteness of the world, and of the end which is imminent to us all because we are all beings of this finite world. It is precisely the intensity of this insight which explains why Jesus, like the Old Testament prophets, expected the end of the world to occur in the immediate future. The majesty of God and the inescapability of His judgment, and over against these the emptiness of the world and of men, were felt with such an intensity that it seemed that the world was at an end and that the hour of crisis was present.

Jesus proclaims the will of God and the responsibility of man, pointing towards the eschatological events, but it is not because he is an eschatologist that he proclaims the will of God. On the contrary he is an eschatologist because he proclaims the will of God.²

¹Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, p. 40.

²Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (London: S.C.M. Press, 1960), p. 26.

Bultmann's concept of mythology and eschatology is helpful to thinking about the "Kingdom of God." In the first part of this chapter similar thoughts on mythological expression in the Old Testament were voiced by Amos Wilder. The hope of Jesus and the early Christian community was not fulfilled. The same world still exists and history continues. The course of history has refuted mythology: the concrete expression of unexpressible truths. The conception "Kingdom of God" is mythological, as is the conception of the eschatological drama. Just as mythological are the presuppositions of the expectation of the Kingdom of God, namely, the theory that the world, although created by God, is ruled by the devil, Satan, and that his army, the demons, is the cause of all evil, sin and disease. The whole conception of the world which is presupposed in the preaching of Jesus in the New Testament generally is mythological; i.e., the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the inner life of the soul, the conception that men can be tempted and corrupted by the devil and possessed by evil spirits. This conception of the world we call mythological because it is different from the conception of the world which has been formed and developed by science and accepted by all modern men. Beginning from this point, Bultmann's main thesis is brought out that the New Testament needs to be "demythologized." By this he means the New Testament must be interpreted to "recover" the deeper meaning behind the mythological conception of eschatology.¹ This area would of course be a thesis in itself so I cannot pursue it any further.

Dr. Craig says in his article in The Interpreter's Bible that there are three positive values in the eschatological conditioning of the teaching of Jesus. First, it provided the historical situation in which the radical, ultimate ethic of Jesus was proclaimed. He called for absolute obedience to the will of God in the light of the coming of God's perfect rule. Secondly, the kingdom hope of Jesus finds in God its basis of confidence

¹Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 18.

rather than in man. He is not divorced from man and his world but it is upon God that we must depend. Finally, the eschatological framework of the teaching of Jesus is of permanent significance because it provides a symbol of truth that history finds its consummation in him. So we believe that history has its meaning in the rule of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as he was revealed in Jesus Christ.¹

Notice must be taken of the "realized eschatology" position which C. H. Dodd has advocated. For some it has seemed to be a means of bringing greater unity into the New Testament message. Dodd holds that the message of Jesus was strictly "eschatological" but its "eschatology" was completely realized in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus taught that the Kingdom had come. This is supported by numerous statements of Jesus. Jesus intimates the presentness of the Kingdom again and again. It would seem from Matthew 6:33 that the Kingdom can be realized here with all its blessings. Then there is that clear statement to the Pharisees in response to their question on when the Kingdom of God was coming.

The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo there it is,' or 'there!' for behold, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you.²

Yet too, it would seem the kingdom has not fully arrived but is in the process of arriving. Jesus says to the scribe in Mark when he answered him well, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:28-34). Then in that important story to Christians of Nicodemus Jesus says, "I say to you, unless a man is born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Dodd sees all words about a future coming as representing an alien importation from the beliefs of the disciples. Craig criticizes Dodd's position because he feels it doesn't face the crucial question:

¹C. T. Craig, "The Teaching of Jesus," Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), p. 153.

²Luke 17:21.

Where is the source of the vivid eschatological hope which inspires the disciples? Until that source is discovered elsewhere it is much sounder historically to accept the truthfulness of the findings of earliest tradition as the source of inspiration in Jesus.¹

We must conclude, I think, that Old Testament eschatology was realized in Jesus but it was also still in the process of being realized. Jesus was the initiator as well as the fulfillment.

From this brief summary of the eschatology in the teaching of Jesus we are ready to look at the three major influences on Christian thought: Paul, John and the Book of the Revelation. Time only allows me to touch on the highlights of their eschatology. Jesus is their authority and touchstone, as he is ours.

Paul

Bultmann says that the eschatological preaching of Jesus was retained and continued by the early Christian community in its mythological form. But very soon the process of demythologizing began, partially with Paul and radically with John. The decisive step was taken when Paul declared that the turning point from the old world to the new was not a matter of the future but did take place in the coming of Jesus Christ. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4). Paul still expected the end of the world as a cosmic drama, the parousia of Christ on the clouds of heaven, the resurrection from the dead, the final judgment, but with the resurrection of Christ the decisive event has already happened.²

Paul had two "tutors unto Christ": One Jewish and the other Greek. He learned his Judaism in a Hellenistic milieu but his rabbinic training and influence made him a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). Gregory Dix says Paul is not guilty of Hellenizing Christianity. Theologically speaking, Paul was reared in the

¹Craig, "The Teaching of Jesus," Interpreter's Bible, p. 153.

²Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 32.

faith of a devout Jew of his time, that is, believing in the one God, righteous and holy, in the election of Israel to be His Special People, in the Law as the unique revelation of God's will for men, and in the hope of the Messiah. His letters show that even when he became a Christian, these things remained basic to his thinking.¹ Certainly Paul knew the new life in Christ from the time of the Damascus Road experience when Christ confronted him.²

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live, in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.³

The Church for Paul is the eschatological community of the elect, of the saints who are already justified and alive because they are in Christ. Christ as the second Adam abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (Romans 5:12-14, II Timothy 1:10). Death is swallowed up in victory (I Cor. 15:54). Therefore Paul can say that the expectations and promises of the ancient prophets are fulfilled when the gospel is proclaimed:

Behold, now is the acceptable time [about which Isaiah spoke], behold, now is the day of salvation.⁴

The Holy Spirit which was expected as the gift of the time of blessedness has already been given. In this manner the future is anticipated.

This demythologizing may be observed in a particular instance Bultmann contends. In the Jewish apocalyptic expectations, the expectation of the messianic kingdom played a role. The messianic kingdom, or the "interregnum" (at the end of which Christ

¹A. M. Hunter, Introducing New Testament Theology (London: S.C.M. Press, 1957), p. 88.

²Acts 9:3-19.

³Galatians 2:20.

⁴II Cor. 6:2.

will deliver the Kingdom to God, the Father) is for Paul the present time between the resurrection of Christ and his coming parousia (I Cor. 15:24). That means, the present time of preaching the gospel is really the formerly expected time of the Kingdom of the Messiah. Jesus is now the Messiah, the Lord.

This view is backed up by A. M. Hunter who says Paul thought of Christian salvation as a word with three tenses. It meant a past event, a present experience, and a future.

We were saved (Romans 8:24).

We are being saved (I Cor. 15:2).

We shall be saved (Romans 5:9).

Indeed Romans 5:1 takes in all three tenses:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom also we have obtained access into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.¹

C. H. Dodd says in his commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans that Paul's theology starts from objective facts in the real world, to which inward experience gives meaning. He was on the outside of the historical events of Christ and his followers. Then he came in, and his experience enabled him to look at history from the inside. What Paul gives us in his writings, is an interpretation, in the light of his experience, of a series of events in which he now saw a saving act of God and which so regarded gave him a key to all history as divinely ordered. In Jewish thought of the "apocalyptic" type, by which he was strongly influenced, history was held to be working up to a tremendous crisis, in which "This Age" should pass away and give place to "The Age to Come," the age of direct divine intervention in human affairs, the age of miracle. Paul held that with Jesus Christ the Age to Come had actually begun.

What is old is gone; the new has come . . . Jesus Christ had lived and died, and the church had arisen with a new

¹Hunter, New Testament Theology, p. 91.

and distinctive corporate life of its own. These facts had drawn Paul into its orbit. They mediated to him that touch of God upon his spirit by which he was made a new man.¹

For Paul, the future has in a real sense become the present, and Christians are already enjoying the blessings of the end-time. Already acquitted (justified), they do not need to wait for God's verdict on Judgment Day. Already they possess the Holy Spirit promised by the prophets for the last time. Already they are "in the realm of God's beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

Amid all this awareness of present blessing there shines for Paul the hope of God's final consummation "when Christ who is our life shall appear" (Colossians 3:4), the Last Judgment will take place and the faithful will gain "glory and honour and immortality" (Romans 2:7). If earlier letters, like those to the Thessalonians, suggest that Paul expects the Day soon, his later ones, like Colossians, do not stress its imminence. But, comes it soon or late, it will mean the final defeat of evil and the complete triumph of God's purpose in Christ.

In his teaching about the "Last Things," Paul is well aware that "we know only in part," that our earthly vision of these realities is like peering through an unclear mirror (Cor. 13:9-12). But of one thing he is invincibly sure, that nothing in the world or out of it will be able "to separate us from the love of God in Christ" (Romans 8:38). Beyond this he does not go. It is enough to know that "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal, immortality" (Cor. 15:53), "and with God be the rest."²

Gospel of John

"Many would call St. John the greatest of the interpreters." So Hunter begins his section on John in his book on New Testament theology.

¹C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Great Britain: Collons Clear-Type Press, 1959), p. 25.

²Hunter, Introducing New Testament Theology, p. 102.

Standing farthest from the event, he saw its most abiding significance, so that Christ appears no longer merely as a figure in past history but as the great Contemporary. 'The Jesus of History,' it is as if John were saying to us, 'is the Christ of experience. What he is now to my faith, that he was in the days of his flesh.' And all down the centuries John has so communicated something of his secret to his readers that his Gospel still speaks to the condition of sage and simple, serving at once as the text-book of the parish priest and divine philosophy for a Wordsworth or a Westcott.¹

The author of John shows himself far more aware of Greek thought than Paul does, Hunter observes, but his eschatology is undeniably Jewish. John demythologizes the eschatology of the times in a radical manner, Bultmann declares.² For John the coming and departing of Jesus is the eschatological event.

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (John 3:19). Now is the Judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out (John 12:31).

For John the Resurrection of Jesus, Pentecost, and the "parousia" of Jesus are one and the same event, and those who believe already have eternal life.

He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already (John 3:18).

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him (John 3:36).

Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live (John 5:25).

I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me though he die, yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die (John 11:25,26).

¹Hunter, New Testament Theology, p. 125.

²Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 33.

As in Paul, so in John demythologizing may be further observed in a particular instance. In Jewish eschatological expectations we find that the figure of the anti-Christ is a thoroughly mythological figure as it is described, for example, in II Thessalonians 2:7-12. In John, false teachers play the role of this mythological figure. Mythology has been transposed into history. The examples from John and Paul outlined in these preceding pages by Bultmann are cited by him as justifying demythologizing the New Testament today, since this task had its beginning in the New Testament itself.¹

No New Testament writer laid hold on the truth of "realized eschatology" more surely than John, Hunter contends. Only, for the language of "the Kingdom," he substitutes the language of "life." In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus says, "The Kingdom of God is at hand . . . has come upon you" (Mark 1:15, Luke 11:20). In the Fourth Gospel he says, "The hour is coming and now is" (John 4:23, John 5:25).

For John then, eternal life is a present boon because Christ has come and died and risen and the Holy Spirit is here, released for men by his dying (John 7:39). This truth he develops in three ways. Firstly, Judgment does not merely come at the end of history; it is for better or worse, a present reality (John 3:17-21, John 5:22-24). True, God's gift of Christ was designed not for man's doom but for his deliverance, but inevitably men judge themselves by their response to the Fact of Christ. The primary purpose of the sun is not to cast shadows, but it does. So it is with him who is the Light of the World. To accept Christ is to pass out of the range of Judgment; to reject him is to condemn oneself.

Secondly, resurrection is not merely "then" but "now." When Martha affirms that her brother will rise "at the last day," Jesus answers, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). There

¹Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 34.

is no denial of a resurrection at "the last day," but there is an insistence that for those in fellowship with Christ the life to which resurrection leads begins now. Jesus was saying in effect to Mary, Hunter maintains, that her brother was alive now, for in him Lazarus had touched the life of God which was eternal and so in him he had already risen before his body perished.¹

Thirdly, without abandoning the hope of a final coming, John teaches a return of Christ in history through the Resurrection and the coming of the Spirit.² John didn't de-eschatologize the Gospel, giving us Christian mysticism instead. He did not abandon the primitive Christian eschatology, but stripping it of "the glittering robe of apocalyptic" which it first assumed, he pierced down to its abiding truth. In this Hunter believes John is true to the mind of Christ.³

For all his stress on "realized eschatology," John never abandons his hope of a final dénouement. Thus, in both Gospel and Epistle, he looks for a "last day" (John 6:39,40,44,54; I John 4:17), a Coming of Christ (John 14:3,21,22; I John 2:28) with a resurrection and judgment (John 5:29,12:48; I John 4:17), and a final bliss for the redeemed (John 14:3, 17:24; I John 3:2). The heart of Christian eschatology for John seems to be found less in the expectation of a Second Coming on the clouds of heaven than in the historical Fact of Jesus, which is the appearance of the eschaton in time.⁴

The Revelation to John

The Book of the Revelation is one book of the Bible that has caused great confusion and led to aberrations within the body of Christians throughout its history. As Henry P. Van Dusen said

¹Hunter, New Testament Theology, p. 137.

²John 14:18,21,23,28; John 16:16,22.

³Hunter, New Testament Theology, p. 143.

⁴Hunter, New Testament Theology, p. 144.

in the Introduction to Dr. Niles book on Revelation, "Many, like myself have always found the Apocalypse forbiddingly obscure, elusive and uncongenial."¹ There are many views on Revelation as to whether it is a prediction of future events, an exposition of a particular historical situation, or a collection of apocalyptic oracles.

Dr. Niles presents a view held by many scholars. His presentation of Revelation really does unlock surprising riches. He finds Revelation a wonderful country for tourist and pilgrim.

It is an important part of scripture and an adequate understanding of it is essential for a right appreciation of the Biblical message as a whole.²

It is an Apocalypse and herein lies our interest in it.

It is the knowledge that Revelation belongs to a specific type of literature, the Apocalyptic, which has made it possible to interpret it with relative confidence, for all literature of this type has certain common features.

John (not John of the Gospels) wrote his book at a time of grave peril for the Church. Persecution had broken out and many had already suffered for the faith. John himself was an exile on the island of Patmos. Persecution was seen as the result of earthly power defending itself in rebellion against its heavenly King who was exercising His rule through the Church. The book was written to seven leading churches of Asia addressing their problems and encouraging them to keep the faith. John is writing though, to the whole Church.

The word by which John designates the message which he communicates is the word "apocalypse." It is a revelation, an unveiling, an uncovering. Three times in the book the affirmation is made: I am the Lord God, the beginning and the ending, the

¹D. T. Niles, As Seeing the Invisible (London: S.C.M. Press, 1961), p. 8.

²Niles, Invisible, p. 15.

Alpha and the Omega. In Revelation 1:8 this affirmation follows the declaration of God's purpose in history; in 21:6 it follows a description of the redeemed state; and 22:13 it follows a statement on the process of divine judgment. God is unveiled as the Author and Finisher of the course of human history; the Initiator and Fulfiller of the course of world redemption; the Beginning and the Ending of the course of divine judgment. God's plan in creation will be consummated; Christ's work of salvation will be concluded; the Holy Spirit will effect His work of restoring the "Imago Dei."¹

Again and again John makes the claim that he is writing as a prophet which means that he is proclaiming a direct Word of God and not teaching speculative doctrine.² "Thus saith the Lord" is the prophet's authentic posture: and the substantiation of John's claim lies in the fact that the message he delivers has been found to apply from age to age. The particular interpretations given time after time to the visions he conveys may have been arbitrary, but just because it is prophecy he writes, it illuminates the meaning of any time, and affords guidance for living in every age.

There is a distinction between prophecy and apocalypse that must be remembered: whereas prophecy is a thrust of the Word of God into the present, apocalypse is also an unveiling of the meaning of the present in the light of the final end. Christian apocalypse is written from the standpoint of the contemporaneousness of the Church to the Christ who is risen and who will come again. The real meaning of the present was to be seen from the standpoint of the future.

Christian apocalypse has one other concern that Dr. Niles points out, and that is to affirm the conclusion of the Church's task. At the heart of his message John makes this affirmation, but when he speaks of the conclusion of the Church's task he doesn't

¹Niles, Invisible, p. 27.

²Revelation 1:3, 10:7, 19:10.

mean that all men will repent and turn to God, but that the Church's task will be brought to a close by God Himself; and only as God brings to its fulfillment His redeeming work, will He allow evil to enact His last Calvary.¹ All of the terms used in apocalyptic writing are symbols and John is rife with symbolism which offers pitfalls for the unwary literalist. The symbolism is partly for the purpose of ensuring secrecy, for an apocalypse is marching orders issued in code, and partly for the purpose of awakening emotional response to the message that is declared.²

The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.(Revelation 11:15).

And so we reach the end of our run through the Old and New Testaments. The body of the Christian thought has been sketched; the Christian view of history contained in these our historical treasure books has been layed out; and we can begin our journey through the history that leads to our modern secular world of today. It has been a long journey from Moses to Christ, a very short one to John of Patmos. At this point the Biblical record says the journey is ended, the time has come, indeed history has been fulfilled, and we must wait faithfully and patiently for the end, which is imminent. We are living in the Year of the Lord. Like a watchman we must watch and wait.

So let's step from John to today through history, stepping first on the thinkers between then and now who grappled with this Christianity and the problem of history.

¹Revelation 11:7 ff.

²Niles, Invisible, p. 28.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIANITY AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY

The questions that men ask of history are finally the questions, "Does history have meaning? And if so, what is it?" Religion, particularly, asks for the meaning and purpose of history, not for the partial meanings and purposes which we insert into history. A Karl Popper or an Oswald Spengler says, "History has no meaning whatsoever." They deny what most philosophy and theology seek. It is true that not all men engaged in the quest for meaning are looking for the same things.

However, for the Christian, Tillich's phrase "ultimate concern" is the key to the Christian attempts to answer the questions of meaning. It is the Christian conviction that in certain crises of history insights are found--are revealed--which offer a glimmer of understanding, which do something to make sense of the whole, or to offer men salvation through the struggles of history. Such insights do not of course, do the work of the historian in ascertaining facts about events. They offer meaning for life in history. Richard Niebuhr speaks of these two aspects of history in terms of internal and external history.¹

In the problem of history and search for meaning and purpose, the rivals of Christian belief are certain other "mythologies" which claim to bring some unity or coherence into the tangled thread of history. Faith in progress is most evident. The distinguishing feature of this "faith" is not that it affirms the

¹Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 81. Historian, R. C. Collingwood, in Idea of History says every event has an inside and an outside. The historian works from the outside to the inside.

fact of progress, for almost any interpretation of history may take account of progressive developments. It is only when progress is understood as a central principle, as the key to interpreting the facts and discerning the meaning of history, that it takes the all-embracing form of a mythology. As with all mythologies, some adherents of the faith in progress do not realize that it is a myth and a faith. Thomas Dewey in his earlier thought did not. While cautiously denying many a theory of inevitable progress, he insisted that scientific method was the guarantee of progress if men wanted it. He made the amazing claim:

We have now a sure method. Wholesale permanent decays of civilization are impossible.¹

To generations habituated to the progress mythology, the Christian drama appears fantastic. It seems incredible that otherwise sane theologians should once again be speaking seriously of it. For it asserts that God created the world and man, that although man was granted freedom and used it to sin, God maintained a sovereignty over history and worked mighty acts of salvation within it; that God sent His Son to redeem history; and that God, after revealing His purposes in His Son, will in His own time end history with a Last Judgment and the establishment of His undisputed sovereignty in a Kingdom of God.²

Roger Shinn in his book Christianity and the Problem of History sees the development of Christian thought as following a single thread that is twisted of three strands. These strands are: the Church as the Kingdom of God (ecclesiastical), Eschatological fulfillment, and the dynamic character of history. They are the main emphases of the men who contributed most to the body

¹Roger Shinn, Christianity and the Problem of History (St. Louis, Missouri: The Bethany Press, 1964), p. 22. I must acknowledge here my great reliance upon Shinn's work for most of this chapter.

²Shinn, Christianity, p. 23.

of Christian interpretation and thought: Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin. Their influence cannot be underestimated. It is with these men we shall briefly deal in an attempt to build a bridge over the gap from Biblical times to the modern age.

A. Augustine

Traditional Christianity could not conceive history apart from the Last Judgment and the establishment of God's Kingdom in purity and power. This radical eschatological emphasis, so foreign to modern thought, becomes a live option when one considers the alternatives, as many of its critics refuse to do. From the Augustinian point of view the alternatives are utopianism, the illusion that history can fulfill itself and cynicism, that there can be no fulfillment in history. In Augustine's conception, the Christian finds blessedness by participation in the heavenly society on earth and realizing he is a pilgrim and sojourner on earth. Shinn feels that Augustine's scriptural literalism betrays him into crude and unwarranted descriptions of the future.¹

Augustine emphasizes all three strands and even in his errors Augustine's basic position stands out clearly. With searching realism he denies all the historical illusions of man in his society; then he insists that history is not simply a process of making the best of a miserable situation, but is the realm where God, who has the last word on history, gives meaning to the confused situation. History is moving toward its fulfillment. Eternity, although it will destroy the sinful character of history, will fulfill the temporal process. This world shall pass away by transformation, Augustine felt, not by absolute destruction. Thus the Kingdom of God is neither simply the denial nor simply the enhancing of history. This strand must be reinforced by two others lest it lose the Christian feeling for the dynamic of the Kingdom of God and retreat into other-worldliness.

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 54.

The divine society, as it exists in history, is for Augustine essentially a community of faith and of love drawn from all peoples and all times. In attempting to overcome the problem of having a philosophy of total history instead of this diversion between secular and religious history, Augustine established a close relationship between the society of God and the Church of Rome. He introduced another difficulty by applying the attributes of the invisible community to the ecclesiastical institution. The issue of history is salvation, and the church offers two essentials of salvation: the authoritative truth and the sacraments.

The ecclesiastical strand in the thread of history is both a necessary and a dangerous one, Shinn maintains. It may offer a needed immediacy of experience by which the demands and promises of the eschatological community become vivid in history or it may make impossible an understanding of universal history. Augustine's "civitas Dei," City of God, gives meaning to all life and history but when the "civitas Dei" is so closely associated with an ecclesiastical institution, it is subjected to error and sin and ecclesiastical pride.

As for the third strand, Augustinian Christianity is not usually esteemed for its emphasis upon the creative character of history. Several Christian doctrines, however, force Augustine to take history seriously. Firstly, his great emphasis upon God's creation of the world; secondly, the affirmation of God's sovereignty and providence makes secular history a significant realm; thirdly, the doctrine of Incarnation (God in Christ) elevates the importance of history; fourthly, the essential eschatological mythology insists that history has a direction and moves toward an End which gives it final significance.

For Augustine, Christ was the center of history. He views the whole of history from his two cities concept: the City of Man and the City of God. These were founded by two loves: the

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 43.

earthly love of self even to the contempt of God; the heavenly city by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.¹ From this perspective Augustine surveys the whole of history, tracing the conflict of the two societies from the beginning to the present. The Christian though, had a social responsibility and must not seek an escape from history. This [historical] strand was not as well developed as the others.

B. The Church as the Kingdom of God

Where Augustine desired to know nothing but the soul and God, St. Thomas Aquinas had a much wider interest in the world, though in the end was less concerned with history. He accepted the outlines of Augustine's interpretation of history. He took for granted the main events in the history of salvation: Creation, Fall, history of the chosen people, Incarnation, church, future judgment and consummation of history. The interpretation of history was not a major concern. Sacred doctrine was for St. Thomas clearly a "science" to be developed systematically. History was not. The reason for this lay in Aquinas' conceptions of God and salvation as well as of the church.

His conception of God was non-historical. Aquinas combined the Neo-Platonic God of pure being and the Aristotelian unmoved mover. God was the Be-All and the End-All of history but altogether immutable and impassive. Indeed the question arises as to why there should be any creation or history at all. The answer is the Neo-Platonic idea that all the grades of being should be filled. Such an explanation, whatever its use for metaphysics, does not lead to a dynamic conception of history.

Salvation has nothing to do with the process of history, except for the bare fact that it is future. Final bliss is the contemplation of God. The problems of history get a mystical rather

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 43.

than an eschatological solution. History is not thundering toward the realization of its destiny; rather the Christian, in the contemplative life, finds a foretaste of the heavenly vision of God. The course of history is the prelude to salvation only in the sense of a preliminary discipline.

The purpose of history, as St. Thomas saw it, was not to be found in living through the turmoil of history and trying to find the destiny of men and nations under God's guiding hand. It was already realized in a present historical institution, the church, save for the final beatitude of the "visio Dei." The church provides for the two indispensables: the sacraments and divine authority. The sacraments are the present possession which anticipate the future vision of God. God presides over the Church triumphant and Christ provided a head on earth for the church militant. This head was the pope.

Aquinas felt there was no need for either historical or vivid apocalyptic expectation when the church has as its present possession the sacraments and a leader with power comparable with Christ's. The great drama of history has passed its climax. Although God still performs miracles, it is the church, not history, which is regarded as the theatre of His mighty acts. So by this view, St. Thomas submerged the eschatological and the dynamic strand of interpretation. Aquinas was made the authoritative philosopher of the Roman Catholic Church in 1879 and confirmed by Canon law in 1917. The majority of contemporary Catholic writing is in the Thomist tradition and consequently in the philosophic tradition of the Middle Ages. It must be pointed out that Roman Catholic theology, since Vatican II, has begun to shake itself free from Thomistic patterns of thought.

C. Radical Eschatology

The eschatological theme, the second strand, dominates when Christians are especially impressed by the otherness of God, the radical divine judgment upon sin, and the fragmentary character

of meaning in all human institutions. The most spectacular development of this strain of thought since apostolic times has been in the Reformation theology of Martin Luther. Luther brought to the problem of history several insights capable of filling in the gaps in Thomism. His attacks upon the pretensions of ecclesiasticism and his insistence upon the holiness of all vocations opened the way to a new appreciation of the historical. He felt the dynamic throb of meaningful time and regarded Renaissance learning as a sort of John the Baptist, preparing the way for renewed preaching of the Gospel.

Most significant was Luther's revived interest in the dynamic aspects of Christian apocalypse. In this Luther went back to long obscured ideas of Augustine and the Bible. Throughout his writings he kept the basic motif: history is the realm of conflict which will culminate in victory for the Kingdom of God. The eschatological urgency of the New Testament, long almost smothered, breathes again. Unfortunately in his emphasis, the Kingdom of God becomes separated from history.

In Luther's teaching the Last Days became imminent. The "signs of the times" were evident everywhere. Luther saw them in the actions of the pope, astronomical occurrences, historical convulsions, threats from the Turks. In writings and preachings from 1520 until his death, he makes frequent references to literal expectations of the End of history. Luther refused to predict days and hours and urged planning for the future.

The End of history brings the Last Judgment, fearful and portentous for the sinner. But the man of faith may pray eagerly, "Thy kingdom come." In that day the full purpose of God will be revealed. In the individual and cosmic apocalyptic transformation the Kingdom of God fulfills history. This expectant futurism does not destroy the sense of the Kingdom of God as a living, present reality identified at times with faith and with life flowing from faith. This is well expressed in this petition:

Grant that this Thy Kingdom, now begun in us, may increase, and daily grow in power . . . Help us that we may remain constant, and that Thy future kingdom may finish and complete this Thy kingdom which is here begun.¹

God is sovereign Lord of History, and like Augustine, Luther sees that the Christian faith demands that God's sovereignty be discernible even in the events that seem to defy Him. But even more than Augustine and Aquinas, Luther emphasized the hidden character of God's sovereignty. He declared that God's sovereignty is carried out in all events, but that His Lordship is concealed from our blind eyes until the last day when He will make it known.

There are serious problems here, Shinn points out. How far are God's judgments actually carried out in history? The issue is not simply that of victory or justice in a historical struggle but of eternal destiny for body and soul. God will win out eventually, though at first possibly it is not apparent.

The executor of God's will in its purest form is His own Word. The Christian has no responsibility except to proclaim God's Word since the Word will accomplish everything else.

Luther stated strongly that secular rulers are ordained of God. They are to be obeyed because they carry out God's will. Even evil is God's instrument doing His will and Luther simultaneously called men to repentance and to do battle against it. The devil is the most intriguing of the executors of God's sovereignty along with his henchmen, the pope, the Turk, and others.

Luther's ideas might have been brought together in a penetrating interpretation of history. Luther never did this, because he could not decide clearly how the heavenly and earthly kingdoms might be related. The eschatological theme so dominated his understanding of history that he was unable to develop a constructive theology for a this-worldly social hope.

Luther transformed, rather than submerged, the ecclesiastical

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 77. This is from one of Luther's meditations.

theme. Although he did not retain the Catholic view in his emphasis upon the church, he regarded it as a spiritual community built on Christ. In this sense, but not as a particular historical institution with a human head, the church was identifiable with the Kingdom of God and is of utmost importance for salvation. Man reaches the Kingdom by the sheer vault of faith in response to God's love.

Luther failed to carry his creative insights adequately into the area of politics. And history without politics is after all history with its skeleton removed. Luther so strongly contrasted the two kingdoms that the Gospel was completely irrelevant to the ugly realities of the earthly kingdom.¹ The utter separation of the heavenly kingdom of love from the earthly or devilish kingdom of secular power blocked a great interpretation of history.

D. The Hope for Transforming History

The development of the third strand in the thread of history neither identifies the Kingdom of God with a particular historical institution (like the ecclesiastical strand) nor separates it utterly from all historical institutions (like the radical eschatological strand). Instead it seeks the realization of God's sovereignty within an entire historical community, small or large.

This strand is harder to locate for the Christian hope has never been entirely, and usually not primarily, for a development of the social-historical process. The whole Biblical-eschatological view of history contains at least the germ of the idea of dynamic realization. These ideas that burst forth here and there merged into the heaven-storming spirit of Renaissance secularism and some of the Protestant sects. The visionary expectations of radical sects were then confronted by the disciplined realism of

¹Some interpreters of Luther would question this interpretation of Luther, feeling that this was a distortion that tended to occur in later Lutheranism rather than in Luther himself. See for example G. Forell, Faith Active in Love.

Calvinism. From these two movements, so different in character, the modern Christian world drew its impulse to transform history.

Calvin inspired Protestantism with the will to dominate the world and to change society and culture. He emphasized both the absolute sovereignty of God and the urgency of moral action. The problem of logical consistency he overcame by passing it off as an issue ~~inscrutable~~ to man's feeble eyes; or by differentiating God's will which is always executed, and His commands, which are often defied.

The moral activism took form in the famous effort to establish a theocracy in Geneva, with the "Word of God" in the form of Biblical moral commandments the absolute authority for public and private morality and belief. Church and state were separate, but the state had a specific mission to work with the church for the accomplishment of God's commands throughout the whole community including personal, political, and economic life. Calvin's conception of the radical transcendence and righteousness of God as opposed to the iniquity of the world was sharp like Luther's but instead of despairing of the sinful world, he set out to conquer it. Calvin probably allows himself more enjoyment of the future prospects of the worldly society than any writer before him. This is because his view of the Christian society (corpus Christianum) is dynamic. It is the sphere of operation of God's efficient will through the enlisted will of man.

Calvin's conception of God is so dynamic that the history which He governs must likewise be dynamic. God is no unmoved mover.

Calvin's God is the eternally creating, the eternally working, the everacting God, the Almighty who in this world and through this world builds his Kingdom . . . All the power of the world, all the forces of the earth strive for the one great final purpose: the full realization of the glory of God.¹

This same sense of God's transcendence, however, makes it impossible for Calvin to find the significance of history solely

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 90.

within history. "He will tolerate no creature worship, no idolatry of an ideal society. The Kingdom of God or of Christ is not to be confused with the Geneva theocracy. The "spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things very different and remote from each other."¹ Nor is the Kingdom identical with the Church though the relation is close. It is of a spiritual nature, not of this world, yet it is within us as righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Calvin asserts with traditional eschatological emphasis that Christ's kingship will not be consummated until the Last Judgment. But the knowledge of Christ's presence assures us victory over the world, the devil and evil. God, not man, brings the Kingdom but God works through men.

Fröhlich finds that Calvin stands, in the history of the idea of the Kingdom of God, midway between the primitive Christian eschatological expectancy and the modern dissolution of eschatology in the belief of progress. We are still well within the traditional Christian understanding of history, which views earthly history as a pilgrimage within the vaster history of salvation. But in looking for concrete historical accomplishments, Calvin is developing one of the authentic themes in the Christian understanding of history.²

It was the combination of Calvinism and sectarianism which, as Troeltsch has shown, did so much to mould the modern world. The sectarian emphasis is a recurrent one throughout Christian history. Proclaiming the pure radical Gospel-ethic and rejecting the churches' ethical compromises with the world, the sect is intentionally a minority group. It is formed of individuals who choose to enter its fellowship. Sharply critical of the world, says Troeltsch, "it always finally revives the eschatology of the Bible."³

Despite the utter contrasts at so many points there were tendencies that encouraged a considerable merging of thought, especially at the points determinative for an interpretation of God's demands,

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 90.

²Shinn, Christianity, p. 91.

³Shinn, Christianity, p. 91.

demands with strict relevance to historical life. Both placed great emphasis on moral activity, on holiness dominating all aspects of life. Both regarded the church as a disciplined community of God's servants. And both (with exceptions among the sects) had a tremendous sense of mission to remake the world according to a Christian pattern.

The interaction was most evident in England. Puritanism, uniting Calvinistic and sectarian impulses, is perhaps the most vivid example. Christopher Dawson, the Roman Catholic historian, goes as far as to say:

Thus the modern Western belief in progress, in the rights of man and the duty of conforming political action to moral ideals, whatever they may owe to other influences, derive ultimately from the moral ideals of Puritanism and its faith in the possibility of the realization of the Holy Community on earth by the efforts of the elect.¹

The problem of the Christian interpretation of history is to make its conception of the fulfillment of human life (the Kingdom of God) relevant to history without confusing it with historical accomplishments which are of ambiguous worth. Calvin's weakness though, is his hammering of the world into subjection to a legalistic authority, which in turn confuses God's will with a historically conditioned code of laws.

E. The Impact of the Idea of Progress

In the Western civilization the idea of "progress" replaced Christian eschatology. This idea moulded the thought of people like the concept of the "Kingdom of God" had. Troeltsch judged that the belief in progress, along with other features of the modern world view, would have been impossible without the background of "religious Personalism" which had come out of Christ-

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 96. This thought reminds one of Tawney's book, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism which deals extensively with the relationship of this Protestant form of thought to the development of Capitalist Western society.

ianity and was enhanced by Protestantism, Calvin's influence being the strongest stream. Modern revolutions and the Enlightenment had been carried through in Protestant countries like Germany, Britain and the United States without the violent break with religion that occurred in France. Protestantism underwent great change in the process.

The distinguishing thing about the modern idea of progress is that it performs the religious function of offering a meaning for history. The apostles of progress were not all in agreement, but all contributed to a new world-view. The variety of faiths which opposed Christianity generally took three forms: faith in revolutionary rationalism, faith in natural evolutionary development and faith in technology.¹

The idea of progress posed new problems for Christian thinkers. The issue was whether progress can be made into a religion. Does historical progress offer the solution to the religious quest for salvation?

Progress is only one aspect of the whole modern world view which has confronted Christianity. Much more disconcerting to Christian thinkers was the picture of the universe which resulted from Newtonian physics. The question arises: Did Christian thought struggle to maintain its integrity against new philosophies of physical science, only to be taken into camp unwittingly by the new idea of history? Scientific philosophies of deism so clearly lost the values of Christianity that Christian thought saw the issue and fought back, sometimes deftly, sometimes clumsily. But the idea of progress had some affinities with Christianity and often seemed a plausible interpretation of providence. It so captured the modern ethos that many a thinker accepted it unconsciously.

The key point came with Immanuel Kant who reinterpreted Christian eschatology along progressive lines. The human will, he feels, can set man on the path of moral progress. The Kingdom of God takes the form of a gradual development within history, sometimes delayed

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 104.

but never completely interrupted.¹

Kant influenced Ritschl. Others like Hegel and Troeltsch carried on this line of thinking. Hegel managed to absorb God into the historical process and still call the result Christianity. History constituted the rationally necessary course of the World-Spirit or Absolute-Mind (Geist). The historical process is ruled by reason and so God guides history. The eschatological consummation is realized by the Christian religion. The Christian epoch is the decisive epoch because with Christ, the time is fulfilled.²

In the United States the issues often seemed to force Christians to choose between clinging to stubborn fundamentalism or interpreting the whole Christian view of history in terms of progress.³

Such a Christianization of the doctrine of progress achieved its most creative effects in the Social Gospel which flourished on the American scene. From Calvinism came the stern determination of the Social Gospel to reshape the world in obedience to God. From the sectarian emphasis came the stress on the Gospel, the hope for a real sanctification of the community, the practice of tolerance, part of its impulse to economic reforms, and the hope that human efforts and human suffering might hasten the advent of God's Kingdom. This Christian stream of thought, formed by sectarian and Calvinist influences, merged with the secular faith in progress to form the Social Gospel's interpretation of history.⁴

The result of this thinking and its various movements for the Christian interpretation of history may be seen by McGiffert's statement in 1915:

¹Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, Trans. by Greene and Hudson, Book Three, Div. 1, Pt. III (Chicago: Open Court, 1934), p. 92.

²Rudolf Bultmann, History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 68.

³See Shinn, Christianity, p. 118.

⁴Shinn, Christianity, p. 121.

The Kingdom of God, which has usually in Christian history been identified with the heavenly kingdom lying in another world beyond the grave, or with the Christian Church itself--an institution in the world but not of it--is now widely interpreted as the reign of the Christian spirit on this earth, or the control of all human relationships and institutions by the spirit of human sympathy, love and service.¹

Rauschenbusch was the most notable leader of the American Social Gospel. He hoped through certain social processes (for example, the movement from capitalism to economic democracy), to Christianize the social order. Theologically, he urged a conception of salvation, not as primarily forgiveness, but as realization of the Kingdom of God. Rauschenbusch sought to strip away apocalypticism from the conception of the Kingdom, lest fanaticism of slothful quiescence be encouraged. With the fog of literalistic misconceptions cleared away, there is a certain likeness between his idea of the Kingdom of God, both present and future, and the New Testament eschatological spirit.

Our present day can learn something from the purposes and spirit of the Social Gospel but since we have experienced through two world wars and a depression, a fury and intensity of history which he did not expect, and have found a persistent and demonic power in evil which he barely guessed at, we can recover powerful aspects of the Christian tradition and faith which Rauschenbusch and others ignored. To recall their eager hopes is not to ridicule them, but simply to understand how suddenly history betrayed those who trusted it.

Walter Marshall Horton represents an heir of the Social Gospel, who is critical of the dogma of progress but interprets Christian hope and confidence with reference to social gains. He discerns a frequent cyclical pattern to history, but finds that religious faith has often formed a new center of life for declining cultures. Horton emphasizes the Kingdom of God as

¹Arthur Cashman McGiffert, The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas (New York: Macmillan, 1919), p. 215.

having both eschatological and contemporary social significance. Like Augustine he sees it as eternal, as present, and as yet to come.

The Social Gospel's stress on activity and its hope for genuine progress in history continue in Horton. The final assurance is that God can redeem history's defeats.

For whether in history or in his own ample eternity, we trust that God will in the end do what mortal creatures can never do if they work for a million years--give meaning to the world process as a whole and guide all the creatures that have issued from his hands back to their final destination in his eternal kingdom.¹

The faith in progress has refuted itself by undergoing the cyclical process of rise and fall which it had denied. But, Shinn feels, this faith born out of the Biblical attitude toward time and history, then developing into a secularism, may have helped Christianity recover part of its birthright, a sense of the possibilities under God for historical action. Social Gospel optimism is now attacked on every hand. Yet influential Christians are retaining aspects of the Social Gospel. Their hopefulness is chastened and subdued, tempered with critical realism, but not blasted. It is probable that wherever historical conditions give opportunity for progressive actions, the influence of a Christian progressivism will remain. But it is doubtful that men will so eagerly seek in it the meaning of history. Final trust and security must rest on firmer grounds than the assurance that history means progress.

F. Marxist and Christian Eschatologies

The most important variation on modern progressive faiths is Marxism. There is a common assumption between modern liberalism and Marxism. Both affirm the major idea that history moves toward its own redemption. No supernatural forces, no heaven-sent salvations are required. Human efforts or the natural process of history will answer the problems of history.

¹Walter Marshall Horton, Our Christian Faith (Boston: Pilgrim, 1945), p. 122.

Hegel's dialectic of history was altered into dialectical materialism by Karl Marx. Marx was convinced he had brought the philosophy of Hegel to perfection. He took over from Hegel the idea of the historical process as a dialectical movement which runs with logical necessity through the opposites of thesis and antithesis. But the moving power according to him is not Mind but Matter in the sense of the powers which are imminent in economic life. All historical phenomena originate in economic-social conditions.

The Communist Manifesto of 1848 is a messianic message. It is a secularized eschatology as the belief in progress was. The proletariat is the carrier of the future. Its dictatorship will lead from an epoch of necessity into the realm of freedom, into the Kingdom of God, without God. From the viewpoint of twentieth century man, harassed by a history that is too much for him, Marx's optimism for the classless utopia would be decidedly comforting, if it could be believed.

A few Christian writers like Temple, Maritain, Reinhold Niebuhr and Arnold Toynbee have called Marxism a "Christian heresy." Heresies typically seize upon specific elements of the mother faith and by rearranging them and shifting the emphasis, work their distortions. Or, they rebelliously revolt against the original faith, only to end with a hostile system which unknowingly takes over much of the framework of the rejected creed. Or they place an idea in a language and context so different from its original form that they blind themselves and their foes to the resemblance. Shinn says that Marxism has used all these tactics.¹

Although Christian thought has seldom shared Marxism's romantic view of historical possibilities, we have seen sectarian visions of a future much like the Marxist dream. The radical criticism of society and conventional morals, the drive toward historical realization of an ideal social order with an end of warfare and

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 132.

injustice, even the analysis of property as the source of discord; all these appear in Christian development from its beginning. So do the rigorous ethics, the severe discipline, the occasional specifically communistic practices. Christians might have their doubts as to the possibility of attaining so unqualified a utopia as Marx foresaw, but it has seemed to many that Marx, if only in his vision of the future ideal, stood in the inheritance of the Hebrew prophets and of the New Testament.

Even more significant is the parallel between Marxist and Christian eschatological frameworks. Both assume a genuinely historical outlook in which a situation can be understood only in terms of its past and future. Both find history driving toward its grand culmination. Increasingly, modern analysts--such as Bertrand Russell, Toynbee, Reinhold Niebuhr--find the clue to Marxism in its secularization of the Christian apocalyptic drama.¹ Like eschatological thinkers from the Bible on through the centuries, Marx tends to fore-shorten the future and see the "Eschaton" as imminent. Typically, he reads the signs of the times and thinks that the great judgment on history is near. Again and again he and Engels see in historical events the crisis which they expect to touch off an early proletarian revolution. The meaning of history for the Marxist and Christian is realized in the eschatological event. The Kingdom of God fulfills history for Christianity. In Marxism with its changed vocabulary, prehistory gives way to history.

Christian and Marxist thought are similar in the area of sin and ideology. Both see man as estranged from his true being. In Christian analysis man tries to overcome his finitude by acting as though he were the center of the universe, by pretending to be God. Or he makes gods in his own image reflecting his peculiar interest, then worships these gods. In Marxism, man tries to deny his finite class character by assuming that his class embodies the total welfare of society. However, it is in tracing the origin of evil solely

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 134.

to economic factors, primarily to the means of production, that Marx differs sharply with Christianity. For Marx, it would seem "sin" is not a spiritual factor. All thought for Marxists is ideology, determined by a particular social condition. In Christian terms the problems of human history lie deeper than changes in the modes of production, and Communist revolutions show little promise of bringing history to its final synthesis. There are facets of Marxist thought that are helpful in the interpretation of human nature and sin. In his protests against idealism, against the belief that men view history from some detached position, Marx shared the existential bent of thought typical of Christianity.

Christianity and Marxism share an appreciation for the providential (or deterministic) character of history, combined with a radical call to men to exercise their freedom. Marx secularizes the providential viewpoint of Calvinism, where the conviction of divine determinism as an incentive to vigorous action. Marx makes the most of the value of both determinism and voluntarism in man's life and history. One cannot overlook the great difference, though, between the Christian God who works His purposes in history and the Marxian dialectical process. The two interpretations of history move in different realms of thought, but their paths are often parallel and their answers analogous.¹

As a result of these parallels some Christian thinkers have attempted a Christian-Marxist synthesis. More influential are a number of contemporary thinkers who stand far more centrally in the tradition of Christian theology and still make incisive but critical use of the Marxist analysis of history. Typical of this approach is Reinhold Niebuhr. Many Christian thinkers of distinction combine appreciation with rigorous criticism of Marxism's conception of history. Berdyaev, Tillich, Heimann, all make use of some of Marx's concepts. These men all regard Christian faith as the ground of

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 141.

their apprehension of the meaning of history and the Christian God as the Lord and Judge of history. They find Marxism useful for sociological and political analysis. But they utterly resist the pretension of Marxism to furnish a meaning for life and an understanding of the religious significance of history.¹ The dialogue between the Christians and Marxists is important and this sort of contact is increasing. Harvey Cox has called for an end to the Communist-Christian vendetta.²

The deepest point of opposition between Marxism and Christianity comes from the fact that both are religious. Both are gospels of salvation. The importance of this Marxist gospel to the course of world history and to the world-view of Christianity and its eschatology have made our fleeting discussion of it important. Marxism stands firmly in the stream of the concern of this thesis: the development of the Christian concept of history up to the modern secular age. The thinking that led up to the secular religion of Marxism was germinated in the seed-bed of Christianity as it influenced history and struggled with its eschatology and world-view. Christianity has greatly influenced Marxist thought but has been greatly influenced too by the Marxian revolution in history.

The foregoing chapter has bridged the gap between Biblical times and the modern secular age in which we stand. It is a small footbridge that has been sketched, but hopefully the main foundations were laid. So, now, we confront the final question of this thesis--what is the Christian concept of history and its eschatology as seen by three major modern thinkers: Reinhold Niebuhr, Rudolf Bultmann and A. Van Leeuwen.

¹Shinn, Christianity, p. 146.

²Harvey Cox, "Let's End the Communist Christian Vendetta," The Christian Century, November 9, 1966, p. 1375-1379. See Markus Barth's articles in November 23 and November 30 on this dialogue.

CHAPTER III

REINHOLD NIEBUHR - FAITH AND HISTORY

Reinhold Niebuhr is the first of three modern theologians who are trying to squarely face and answer the secular world's question of the meaning of history. Niebuhr is a prolific writer, but for this thesis, we will look primarily at his book Faith and History.

This book is a comparison of Christian and modern views of history. Niebuhr says at the outset that it is important in our age to understand how the spiritual complacency of a culture which believed in redemption through history is now on the edge of despair. The real alternative to the Christian faith elaborated by modern secular culture was the idea that history is itself Christ, which is to say that historical development is redemptive. Typical modern theology accommodated itself to this secular scheme of redemption much too readily. Now that the experiences of contemporary man have refuted the modern faith in the redemptive character of history itself, man has been left with a vacuum of despair and meaninglessness.¹

This state of mind is probably best illustrated by a quotation in a recent advertisement for the Christian Century magazine. Lord Dunsany is quoted as saying:

Humanity, let us say, is like people packed in an automobile which is travelling down hill without lights on a dark night at terrific speed and driven by a four-year-old child. The signposts along the way are all marked "Progress."²

The brochure continues to say that the wreckage of the Twentieth Century Babel lies all about us. The traditional forms of morality,

¹Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956).

²This subscription advertisement was circulated in January 1968.

family life, worship, education, the church, pluralism, theology, international alignments have been demolished and history does not reverse itself; the pieces cannot be put together again.

Niebuhr feels that this refutation of modern philosophy has given the Christian faith, as presented in the Bible, a new relevance. However, it must shake off its acceptance of the doctrine of progress and speak clearly and decisively if it is to be heard and listened to.

Modern historical science discovered that human culture is subject to indeterminate development. Natural science added the discovery that nature, as well as human culture and institutions, undergoes an evolutionary process. Thus the static conception of history which was characterized by the Middle Ages was breached. From this point on a development took place in every area of man's life which seemed to justify his new faith. History was no longer an enigma; instead it became the assurance of man's redemption from his every ill.

Once more, history has become an enigma to man. The tragic irony of this refutation by contemporary history of modern man's conception of history embodies the spiritual crisis of our age.¹ In one century modern man had claimed to have achieved the dizzy heights of mastery both of natural processes and historical destiny. In the following century he is hopelessly enmeshed in a historical fate threatening mutual destruction, from which he seems incapable of extricating himself. Since Niebuhr's writing of this, man has gone through an economic boom of the late 1950's and now faces the tragic situation of Vietnam and widespread inflation.

Niebuhr says the modern experience belongs in the category of pathos or irony rather than tragedy because contemporary culture has no vantage point of faith from which to understand the predicament of modern man. It is therefore incapable of rising to tragic defiance of destiny, as depicted in Greek drama, or of achieving renewal of life through contrite submission to destiny, as in Christian tragedy. Actors in today's drama are enmeshed in inscrutable fate, which either drives them to despair, or for which they find false inter-

¹Niebuhr, History, p. 8.

pretations.¹

Niebuhr sees three fundamental errors in man's view of himself. First, the illusion that man's brutality is a vestigial remains of man's animal or primitive past. Man seems to cling to this illusion that the barbaric and ruthless ferocity of the Dark Ages have no counterpart in modern life. Vietnam provides a stark example of this today.² Another favored explanation of the present catastrophes is to hold the "cultural lag" responsible for the, which means to attribute them to the failure of man's social wisdom to keep pace with his technical advances. The culminating error of modern man's misunderstanding of himself is that the self as creator does not master the self as creature merely by the extension of scientific techniques.³

The Christian faith is a "high" religion because it comprehends the whole of history, not just the story of a particular people; and it deals with the problems of evil ultimately, not just relative evil. The Christian faith fully appreciates the threat of meaninglessness which comes into history by the corruption of human freedom. But it does not succumb to the despairing conclusion that history is merely a chaos of competing forces. It has discerned that the divine power which is sovereign over history also has a resource of mercy and love which overcomes the rebellion of human sin, without negating the distinctions between good and evil, which are the moral content of history. The revelations of God in history are, according to the Biblical faith, evidences of a divine grace which both searches out the evil character of human sin and overcomes it. The revelation of God is also comprehended as disclosing to man the transcendent source and end of the whole panorama of history.⁴

¹Niebuhr, History, p. 9.

²One of the most excellent books on the market today is one by Brown, Heschel and Novak entitled Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967).

³Niebuhr, History, pp. 10-12.

⁴Niebuhr, History, p. 22.

Christian faith is tempted more easily to cultural obscurantism than the less history-conscious faiths of the Orient. The temptation arises from the fact that its symbols of the ultimate describe, not some eternal unity, devoid of the concrete and discordant stuff of temporal existence, but a transfiguration of history. A rationalistic age would be impatient with the Christian truth in any event. The truth finds man's historic existence potentially meaningful but does not confine the meaning of life to that existence. This is not sufficiently neat enough for a culture which equates rational intelligibility with ultimate meaning. But Niebuhr adds to this, that the Christian truth was frequently made unavailable to modern men by a theological obscurantism which identified the perennially valid depth of Christian symbols with a pre-scientific form in which they were expressed.¹ This is Bultmann's criticism too of Christian expressions.²

Theological literalism also corrupts the difficult eschatological symbols of the Christian faith. In these the fulfillment of life is rightly presented not as a negation but as a transfiguration of historical reality. If they are regarded as descriptions of a particular end in time, the real point of the eschatological symbol is lost. It ceases to symbolize both the end and the fulfillment of time, or to point to both the limit and the significance of historical development as the bearer of the meaning of life. In the same manner a symbolic historical event, such as the "fall" of man, loses its real meaning when taken as literal history. It symbolizes an inevitable and yet not a natural corruption of human freedom. It must not, therefore, be regarded either as a specific event with which evil begins in history nor yet as a symbol of the modern conception of evil as the lag of nature and finiteness.³

Dr. Niebuhr says that the Christian Gospel, as the final answer to the problems of both the individual life and man's total history, is not proved to be true by rational analysis. Its acceptance is

¹Niebuhr, History, p. 32.

²This was dealt with in the New Testament section, p. 28.

³Niebuhr, History, p. 33.

an achievement of faith, being an apprehension of truth beyond the limits of reason. He emphasizes that such faith must be grounded in repentance for it presupposes a contrite recognition of the elements of pretension and false completion in all forms of human virtue, knowledge and achievement. It is a gift of grace because neither the faith nor the repentance required for the knowledge of the true God, revealed in the Cross and the resurrection, can be attained by man's taking thought.¹ The self must lose itself to find itself in faith unless it be apprehended from beyond itself.²

The failure of the "wisdom of the world" to discern the final source and end of life is due on the one hand to the fact that it seeks God too simply as the truth which supplements historic truth but does not stand in contradiction to it; which completes human virtue but does not anticipate its doom. This is a most astute observation. On the other hand the wisdom of the world may be so impressed by the fragmentary character of human virtue and knowledge and so overpowered by the tragedies and antinomies of life that it sinks into despair, finding no meaning in life and history at all. The alternative fruits of the wisdom of the world are complacency and despair. Niebuhr says that despair may be closer to repentance than complacency is to faith. Christ preferred the "sick" to the "whole" for the "whole" have no need of a physician.

If the New Testament faith ends in the pinnacle of the hope of the resurrection this is also the final expression of a faith which sees no hope that man may overcome or escape the contingent character of his existence. Yet, this faith is not without hope, for it is persuaded that a divine power and love have been disclosed in Christ, which will complete what man can not complete, and which will overcome the evil introduced into human life and history by man's abortive effort to complete his life by his own wisdom and power.³

¹Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ has made me his own. Phil. 3:12 (R.S.V.).

²Niebuhr, History, p. 151.

³Niebuhr, History, p. 150.

Niebuhr saw in Marxism a new and fanatic complacency. The pretension that one group in human society is free from sin, naturally became the source of new and terrible fanaticism. The liberal culture tries to avoid disillusionment by regarding the ideological taint in human knowledge and virtue as the consequence of finite perspective which may be progressively eliminated by a more and more astute sociology of knowledge. This theory, however, leaves one important aspect out of account, that of the process of rationalization, especially the tendency of men to justify self-interest by making it appear identical with the common good.

The complacency of the liberal culture is most unshaken in America where the social and political situation, which supported it, still bears some semblance to the stability of previous centuries. The opulence of American life and the dominant position of American power in the world create the illusion of a social stability which the total world situation belies. The Vietnam war and the racial strife of the past few years have surely dealt a death blow to this complacency, for a world exists which does not any longer swallow the American pill for happiness and progress. Many may avoid the abyss of meaninglessness, believing that a critical analysis of all historic political and moral positions will gradually establish the universal truth.

In Europe the movement from complacency to despair is seen very clearly. The rise of Naziism, in the past decades was, in one of its aspects, the growth of demonic religion out of the soil of despair. Politically, men were willing to entertain the perils of tyranny in order to avoid the dangers of anarchy; and spiritually, they were ready to worship race, nation or power as god in order to avoid the abyss of meaninglessness.¹

The military defeat of this political religion has not altered the spiritual situation of modern culture essentially. The rise of French existentialism is another manifestation of the same despair.

¹Niebuhr, History, p. 162.

No immediate political perils were created as there was no effort to escape the contingent character of the human situation by worshipping false gods. It is in fact, a remarkably consistent effort to remain within the abyss of despair and to renounce the obvious idolatries which seem to offer escape.¹

Existentialism recognizes that life and history are not as coherent rationally as the liberal culture assumed. It also knows that moral ideals are contingent and fragmentary. Lacking a faith, which sees a higher coherence beyond the immediate incoherences, it seeks nevertheless to assert the meaning of the present moment and the present experience in defiance of the chaos of existence. Its islands of meaning in the sea of meaninglessness are, however, tiny and periodically inundated. Existentialism is a desperate affirmation of meaning within the framework of despair. It is thus a very accurate index of the spiritual crisis in contemporary culture.

As was said previously the movement of our day is from complacency to despair. The Christian faith which "is perplexed, but not in despair"² seemed quite irrelevant to a culture which had no perplexities. It has become relevant, though not necessarily acceptable, to a generation which has moved from faith without perplexity to despair. It is, in any event, the apprehension of a wisdom which makes sense out of life on a different level than the worldly wisdom which either makes sense out of life too simply or which can find no sense in life at all. Wisdom which leads to complacency seeks to both overcome the ambiguity of human existence by the power of reason and to deny the sinful and dishonest pretension in this enterprise. Wisdom which leads to despair understands the limits of reason and sees the destructive character of human pretensions.

Moral cynicism, insofar as it recognizes the sinfulness of all men including the self but knows no forgiving love which can overcome this evil, is in despair. The truth of the Christian

¹Niebuhr, History, p. 162.

²II Cor. 4:8.

gospel lies closer to the pessimist because it is a truth that cannot be apprehended at all from the standpoint of intellectual, moral or social complacency. Jeremiah 23:17 condemns the "prophets of the world's ways." Ultimately, acceptance of the truth of the gospel is a gift of grace which stands beyond forms of worldly wisdom.

In pursuing the task of correlating the truth of the Gospel as apprehended by faith to truth otherwise known, Christian Theology is subject to three temptations to error. Each error tends to destroy the redemptive power of the truth of faith. The first is to regard the truth of faith as capable of simple correlation with any system of rational coherence and as validated by such a correlation. The second is when an effort is made to guard the uniqueness of the truth of faith and to prevent its absorption into a general system of knowledge by insisting that Christian truth is miraculously validated and has no relation to truth otherwise known. Protestant literalism is prone to this error. The truth of faith, thus jealously guarded, degenerates into a miraculous historical fact. The third error is to validate the truth of faith but to explicate it rationally in such a way that the mystery is too simply resolved into ostensible rational intelligibility.¹

The basic affirmation of the Christian faith, Niebuhr maintains, is that history is fulfilled and ended in the "Agape" of God, as revealed in Christ. Such a love both completes and contradicts every form of historic virtue.

If the truth of faith merely becomes a "fact" of history attested by a miracle, or validated by ecclesiastical authority, it no longer touches the soul profoundly. If it is made into a truth of reason which is validated by its coherence with a total system of rational coherence, it also loses its redemptive power. The truth of the Christian Gospel is apprehended at the very limit of all systems of meaning. It is only from that position that it has the power to challenge the complacency of those who have completed life too simply, and the despair of those who can find no meaning in life.

¹Niebuhr, History, p. 166.

The fact that the grossest forms of evil enter into history as schemes of redemption and that the Christian faith itself introduces new evils, whenever it pretends that the Christian life, individually or collectively, has achieved a final perfection, gives us a clue to the possibilities and limits of historical achievement. There are provisional meanings in history according to Niebuhr, capable of being recognized and fulfilled by individuals and cultures. But mankind will continue to see "through a glass darkly" and the final meaning can be anticipated only by faith. History therefore, awaits completion, an ultimate judgment. There are provisional judgments upon evil in history but all of them are provisional since the executors of judgment are tainted by the evil they seek to overcome. There are renewals of life in history, individually and collectively, but no rebirth lifts man above the contradictions of man's historical existence.¹

The Christian awaits a "general resurrection" as well as a "last judgment." These eschatological expectations in the New Testament faith however embarrassing when taken literally, are necessary Niebuhr contends for a Christian interpretation of history. If they are sacrificed, the meaning of history is confused by the introduction of false centers of meaning taken from the contingent stuff of the historical process.²

History in short, does not solve the enigma of history. There are facets of meaning in it which transcend the flux of time. These give glimpses of the eternal love which bears the whole project of history. There is a positive meaning also in the ripening of love under conditions of increasing freedom, but the possibility that the same freedom may increase the power and destructiveness of self-love make it impossible to find a solution for the meaning of history within history itself. Faith awaits a final judgment and a final resurrection. Thus mystery stands at the end as well as at the beginning of the whole pilgrimage of man.

¹Niebuhr, History, p. 214.

²Niebuhr, History, p. 215.

But the clue to the mystery is the "Agape" of Christ. It is the clue, says Niebuhr, to the mystery of Creation.

All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.¹

It is the clue to the mystery of the renewals and redemptions within history, since wherever the divine mercy is discerned as within and above the wrath which destroys all forms of self-seeking, life may be renewed, individually and collectively. It is also the clue to the final redemption of history. The Christian faith is the apprehension of the divine love and power which bears the whole human pilgrimage. This love shines through history's enigmas and antinomies and is finally and definitively revealed in a drama in which suffering love gains triumph over sin and death. This revelation does not solve all perplexities, but it does triumph over despair and leads to the renewal of life from self-love to love. To understand from the standpoint of the Christian faith that man cannot complete his own life and can neither define nor fulfill the final mystery and meaning of his historical pilgrimage, is not to rob life of meaning or responsibility.

The New Testament envisages a culmination of history which is not, literally speaking, within time-history. It looks forward to a final judgment and a general resurrection, which are at once both the fulfillment and the end of history. These concepts imply an end in the sense of *Finis*; but the end in the sense of *Telos*, that is as the moral and spiritual culmination of the meaning of history, is not within history itself.

The New Testament looks toward the end of history with faith and hope rather than with fear, despite its anticipation of increased contradictions between good and evil in history. Fear has been banished by the faith that this final climax, as well as the whole drama of history, is under a sovereignty of divine love which has been revealed in Christ.

¹John 1:3. (R.S.V.)

Nothing is added to, and much may be subtracted from the power of this faith by idle speculations about the character and the time of the end of history as *Finis*. Speculations based upon the second law of thermodynamics¹ would seem to make the actual end of history certain but very remote. The certainty of a historical end may tempt all those to despair who find the meaning of life only in the historical process. Against this despair the Christian faith insists that the end as *Finis* is not identical with the end as *Telos*. The *Telos* is the Resurrection. Against the complacency to which men may be tempted by the temporal remoteness of the end, New Testament faith introduces the note of urgency and insists that "the time is short."² It derives this sense of urgency from the feeling that the ultimate judgment and the ultimate issues of life impinge upon each moment of time.³ Bultmann stresses this strongly.

Niebuhr sees a natural inclination in man to transmute the qualitative judgment on history into quantitative speculations and to derive from it the belief that the end is temporally imminent. The first two Christian centuries were spent expecting the imminent second coming. Generation after generation expected the end from the Biblically predicted final evil. The eschatological fears of our own atomic age are like this. Some see this possibility of destruction as the final evil.

The sense of eschatological urgency is morally justified as human decisions are involved in this new historical fate. But Niebuhr maintains that speculations about the end are not only scientifically implausible but religiously wrong.⁴ If then, it is impossible to define the end of history as a particular event in history and since the end or *Telos* lies outside history the question arises: Why take Biblical symbols seriously?

¹The implications of the second law are that the universe is going downhill in the heat-energy balance and will some day reach the point where life is no longer possible.

²I Cor. 7:29.

³Niebuhr, History, p. 236.

⁴Matthew 24:36.

The answer Niebuhr gives is that without these symbols Biblical faith degenerates either into Platonism or Utopianism. In Platonism eternity becomes a "totum simul" which gathers up all historical events and annuls their unique significance in the eternal moment. The significance of the drama of history with its fateful decisions, its cumulative effects, and its unique events is lost. By the symbol of the Resurrection, the Christian faith hopes for an eternity which transfigures, but does not annul, the temporal process.

The symbol of the Last Judgment, on the other hand, emphasizes the moral ambiguity of history to the end. It negates utopian illusions in progressive interpretations of history as vigorously as the symbol of the Resurrection rejects the Platonic flight into an eternity of "pure" being. These eschatological symbols transcend the rational, but they do justice to the temporal and eternal dimensions of man's historic existence. Platonism and modern utopianism are only superficially, but not ultimately more rational. Eternity in Biblical thought does not exist without time.

The Christian community, for Niebuhr, is a community of hopeful believers who are not afraid of life or death, of present or future history, being persuaded that the whole of life and all its historical vicissitudes stand under the sovereignty of a holy, yet merciful, God whose will was supremely revealed in Christ. It is a community which does not fear the final judgment, not because it is composed of sinless saints but because it is a community of forgiven sinners, who know that judgment is merciful if it is not evaded. If the divine judgment is not resisted by pretensions of virtue but is contritely accepted, it reveals in and beyond itself the mercy which restores life on a new and healthier basis. In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper the Christian community lives by a great memory and a great hope. This act is filled with eschatological tension. It is instituted with the words: "This do in remembrance of me." St. Paul declares that, "as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye shew forth the Lord's death till he come."¹ The present

¹I Cor. 11:26.

reality is different because of that memory and hope. What lies between the memory and the hope is a life of grace, in which the love of Christ is both an achieved reality in the community and a virtue which can be claimed only vicariously. The Christian community is always involved in having and yet not having the final truth and grace.¹

Dr. Niebuhr's assessment of contemporary man's modern dilemma of despair and meaninglessness, brought on by the refuting of the modern faith in the redemptive character of history, strikes at the heart of this thesis and its questions. The crucial test is: does he give an answer to man in his dilemma? Niebuhr feels strongly that Christianity can speak with real relevance to this modern man. The snag, however, is that it may be a message of meaning and still not be accepted. It may not be accepted by our rational age because Christianity operates in a realm of wisdom that makes sense on a different level from the world's and is not rationally explicable like the world's wisdom.

In reply to our direct questions, Niebuhr would likely respond that we often look for meaning in the wrong ways and in the wrong places. We look for a historically conditioned meaning to be found in the realm of history itself but no solution is possible in history itself. We can find only contingent meaning in history and any search beyond this leads down blind alleys. Individually we are blocked from finding meaning because of our self-interest, our self-love and our dishonest pretensions of human virtue and self-completion.

The Gospel's acceptance is an achievement of faith beyond the limits of reason. One might wonder here if Niebuhr is stressing an "other-worldliness" and if his view would encourage social inaction? Such is not the case. Niebuhr is very conscious of the sin of man and the evils it leads to. He is very much "this-world" oriented. His writings all stress the need for social action, living the faith, putting the love of Christ into action. But he strongly maintains that man should have no delusions about his power or his goodness.

¹Niebuhr, History, p. 241.

We must act in faith but constantly in the light of repentance and realizing our need for forgiveness and renewal and completion in life. For Niebuhr, history is fulfilled and ended in the Love of God in Christ. It is upon this basis that Niebuhr approaches and speaks to modern secular man.

CHAPTER IV

RUDOLF BULTMANN - HISTORY AND ESCHATOLOGY

As a historian, as a man, and as a Christian, Rudolf Bultmann is concerned with the problem of history.¹ Perhaps it can be said that it is the one great theme which claims his thought. The most eloquent witness to his deep concern is his Gifford Lectures, History and Eschatology² which is the prime concern of this chapter.

Bultmann looks at man in his radical historicity, that is, in his being delivered over to history. Formerly, according to Collingwood, we saw history changing but not the substance of man.³ Today we know from experience that man himself changes with history. Absolutely no area of his existence can avoid it and none is safe from it.

His historicity does not consist in the fact that he is an individual who passes through history, who experiences history, who meets with history. Man is nothing but history, for he is, so to speak, not an active being but someone to whom things happen. Man is only a process without "true existence." The end it seems is nihilism.⁴

Bultmann understands the historical consciousness to have reached such an outlook today. The question has become urgent: Can there be a deliverance from nihilism? Can there be a way to detect a meaning in history and therewith meaning in historical life? This is the major question of this thesis and this approach makes Bultmann most important to our purpose.

¹Heinrich Ott, "Rudolf Bultmann's Philosophy of History," The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann, ed. C. W. Kegley (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 51.

²Rudolf Bultmann, History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957).

³Bultmann, History, p. 10.

⁴Bultmann, History, p. 11.

For Bultmann, knowledge of history in the proper sense exists only as there is an encounter with history itself. The moments of history are not only moments of insight into history; rather the meaning, which is grasped, is already implicit in the events of the encounters themselves. The "meaning of history" exists only in a given moment and not in any comprehensive historic sweep.

The question of the meaning of history was raised and answered for the first time by the Jewish-Christian thought because it believed it knew the end of history and the world. This end was dependent on eschatology. The Greeks didn't raise the question of meaning in history and the ancient philosophers hadn't developed a philosophy of history. A philosophy of history grew up for the first time in Christian thinking. In modern times, Bultmann writes, the Christian eschatology was secularized by Hegel and Marx.¹ Hegel and Marx each in his own way believed they knew the goal of history and interpreted the course of history in the light of this presupposed goal.

However today, Bultmann feels, we cannot claim to know the goal of history. Therefore the question of meaning in history has become meaningless.² But there still remains the question of the meaning of single historical phenomenon and single historical epochs. On this basis Bultmann speaks to modern man whom, as we said in the previous chapter on Niebuhr, faces the despair and meaninglessness of life. He looks around him at the world, and sees no meaning, only chaos. Bultmann tells this man that this [the events of history] is a meaningless area to look at. Man cannot find meaning in the course of history.

The nature of history, in the Bultmann view, is that every historical moment has its own meaning in itself in that it implies openness to God and that it has the possibility of becoming the eschatological moment. Bultmann's whole presentation is geared to show that the revelation of God focuses on the reality in which we

¹Bultmann, History, p. 68.

²Bultmann, History, p. 120.

live and is an experiential possibility. He says simply that the causality of history is human will, which calls forth actions, which in turn set in motion historical events.¹

Bultmann defines eschatology mainly as the ideas concerned with the meaning of history, its goal and man's place in it. His particular emphasis places man's search for meaning in the realm of eschatological concern. Bultmann feels that the best that has been said about the problems of history is contained in Collingwood's book, The Idea of History.² Collingwood does not know any eschatology and he cannot foresee the future. History (in the sense of historical knowledge) must end with the present.

History is for human self-knowledge . . . The value of history then, is that it teaches us what man has done and thus is.³

Every now, every moment, in its historical relatedness, has within itself a full meaning. The meaning of history is imminent in the historical process, because history involves man's mind and thought. So, for Collingwood, every present moment is an eschatological moment, and history and eschatology are identified. History is composed mainly of actions in Collingwood's system but genuine historicity means to live in responsibility, and history is a call to historicity. Bultmann maintains that human history is more than human action but also a matter of encounter with events.⁴

Bultmann has two norms whereby he evaluates various outlooks. The first is negative: an eschatological viewpoint is non-valid and must be rejected to the degree that it embodies cosmological ingredients. A cosmological eschatology per se is mythological. It inevitably confuses history with nature and reduces human existence to the realm of cosmic objectivity. The second is positive: an

¹C. W. Kegley, The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 263.

²Bultmann, History, p. 130.

³Bultmann, History, p. 134.

⁴Bultmann, History, p. 137.

eschatology is valid to the degree that it produces and is in accord with "the complete and genuine historicity of man." The standpoint here is that of an existential anthropology which locates meaning in history in the present moment of decision, through which man achieves authentic selfhood.¹ The first position was referred to in the first chapter. Bultmann insists that the eschatology of the New Testament must be demythologized for Christians to understand it. The second position underlines one of Bultmann's main ideas: every now is an eschatological moment for man when he can find his meaning in history.

Professor Bultmann appears to reject all Greek views because of the Greek cosmologizing of history and developing a cosmic mythology, but also because of the resultant anthropology. Man's individuality is ignored; he is an instance of human Being, which in turn is seen to be an instance of cosmic Being in general. Greek thought fails "to understand man in his historicity."²

The conception of history is completely different in the perspective of Israel under the Old Covenant. There is no tendency to view historical developments as determined by natural forces. History is ruled by a Creator God who has a goal for it. The cycle of rebellion and return is more decisive than the cycle of the seasons. The unity of history derives from the unity of God's promise. The study of history is therefore not scientific but homiletical. Each situation embodies a call to the covenant people to accept their responsibility in the face of the future.³ This call produces critical self-knowledge, an awareness of the past and a hope for the future which transforms the present. "God is always a God who comes. Every moment points to that coming."⁴ Thus Bultmann says the Old

¹Paul S. Minear, "Rudolf Bultmann's Interpretation of New Testament Eschatology," The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann, ed. C. W. Kegley (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 66.

²Bultmann, History, p. 18.

³Bultmann, History, p. 18.

⁴Minear, Bultmann, p. 68.

Testament shows a definite preoccupation with eschatology.

Bultmann sees Jesus as part of the line of his time, that is, the late Jewish apocalyptic thinking. Jesus' expectation of the reign of God was mythological and cosmic.¹ Yet concerning Jesus' understanding of human existence (his anthropology), it did not depend on cosmic mythology. He restored the earlier Jewish view of God, rejecting a false cosmic transcendence, by redefining God as always the coming God who defines the present moment of time as one of radical decision. God's cosmic future was translated into historical nearness; his cosmic transcendence was translated into the demand for an immediate and absolute choice. Individuals and not the nation became central and the wills of the individuals became the fulcrum of historical existence. An ultimate weight was placed on the Now, and this Now was seen in terms of today's encounter with the neighbor; therefore love became the mode of repentance and obedience.²

When Bultmann says that the question concerning the meaning of history is meaningless because the meaning of history can only be revealed at the end of history, he is speaking to the question concerned with the meaning of the whole course of history. Bultmann feels one cannot speak of this possibility of an ultimate understanding of the meaning of history conceived at its end as an actual realization in a last judgment. Nor can one speak in general of the end of history as an ontic (real) fact.

I would not know in what sense one could say that the meaning of history "is revealed" at its end. For whom then, would it be revealed? Certainly not for God. For the final generation of men? For the last historian? Certainly not. For whom then?³

Bultmann's objective is to throw this very question concerning the meaning of history back on the question concerning the meaning of the present--of this moment!

¹Bultmann, History, p. 31.

²Miner, Bultmann, p. 71.

³Kegley, Bultmann, p. 264.

Bultmann will reply to modern, secular man's question of, "where is meaning then?" that his meaning can only be found in the present existential moment of his experience. Here I think Bultmann has a real point of contact with the modern secular man. Modern man in his existential state of despair seeks to find meaning in the present moment of his life. Still as Niebuhr said, the existentialist stays in this state. Meaning in history, Bultmann says, is in the present moment of decision. In this present moment man faces the possibility of achieving selfhood through self-knowledge. This self-knowledge will enable man to see himself. For, in the present moment, the problem and meaning of the past and future are enclosed and waiting to be unveiled by human decision. Man acts in the present on the basis of the past but realizing the responsibility for the future. This decision can only come in man's existential participation in history as he is engaged, challenged and claimed. Apart from this, there is no knowledge of a meaning in history, Bultmann maintains.

It is Bultmann's contention that for any man, any moment has the possibility of being an eschatological moment, pregnant with meaning and fulfillment. Man can realize this possibility whenever, through God's forgiving Word, he is freed from himself, from the old self which by definition has always forfeited its authenticity. The self in man in its historical setting is ultimately the self in a situation of decision before God. Faith comes in as an acceptance of this situation and of the freedom that results. As a free man he can encounter any future confidently and therefore hopefully, since the freedom which faith has given him is not a possession but is ever received anew. In this sense faith is conscious of God's permanent future. For faith, the world has regained its character as creation; faith need no longer wait for a renewal of the world through cosmic catastrophies.¹

The paradox of Christ as the historical Jesus and the ever-present Lord, and the paradox of the Christian as an eschatological

¹Kegley, Bultmann, p. 268.

and historical being is excellently described by Erich Frank:

. . . to the Christians the advent of Christ was not an event in that temporal process which we mean by history today. It was an event in the history of salvation, in the realm of eternity, an eschatological moment in which rather this profane history of the world came to its end. And in an analogous way, history comes to its end in the religious experience of any Christian "who is in Christ."¹

In his faith man is already above time and history. Although the advent of Christ is a historical event that happened "once" in the past, it is, at the same time, an eternal event which occurs again and again in the soul of any Christian in whose soul Christ is born, suffers, dies and is raised up to eternal life. In his faith the Christian is a contemporary of Christ, in Bultmann's view, and time and the world's history are overcome. But, it is the trial of the Christian that although in the spirit he is above time and world, in the flesh he remains in the world, subject to time. The evils of history in which he is engulfed, go on, but the process of history has gained a new meaning under which the Christian has to refine his soul and fulfill his true destiny.² Every instant has the possibility of being an eschatological instant and in Christian faith this possibility is realized.

Man today is increasingly conscious of the world around him and the condition of men today. The Western white society are "rich men in a world slum."³ These same underdeveloped countries are racked by war, starvation and suffering. We in our country have so much; others have so little. Canadians feel a sympathetic note struck within them when they hear Barbara Ward say:

Christians alone straddle the whole spectrum of rich nations, and therefore Christians can be a lobby of tremendous importance. When we come before our heavenly Father, and He says,

¹Bultmann, History, p. 153.

²Bultmann, History, p. 153.

³Frederick Nossal, "Rich Man in a World Slum," Peace, Power, Protest (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967), Ch. IV.

"Did you feed them, did you give them drink, did you clothe them, did you shelter them?" and we say, "Sorry Lord, but we did give them .3 of our gross national product," I don't think it will be enough.¹

In the face of world developments I do question whether secular man can accept Bultmann's stance. He may accept that a moment for him may be an eschatological instant but somehow the meaning he finds has a hollow ring as he looks out his big picture window at the world. What of those whose moments are filled with hunger pains and bloated bellies, or screams of pain from napalm burning on their bodies, or having only a tent and one blanket to shelter them and their baby in a refugee camp, or walking down a street or living in a town where the only companion is aching loneliness and a switchblade? Can history have no meaning for them? Bultmann may be right, but man longs to hear of some common meaning in history with these other billions. The next chapter on Arend Th. Van Leeuwen faces the world scene more than Bultmann and may provide an answer to this problem.

Man cannot answer the question of the meaning of history in its totality, Bultmann tells us. For man does not stand outside history.

The meaning of history lies always in the present, and when the present is conceived as the eschatological present by Christian faith the meaning of history is realized. Man who complains: "I cannot see meaning in history, and therefore my life, interwoven in history, is meaningless," is to be admonished: do not look around yourself into universal history. Always in your present lies the meaning in history, and you cannot see it as a spectator, but only in your responsible decisions. In every moment slumbers the possibility of being the eschatological moment. You must awaken it.²

¹The Development Apocalypse or Will International Injustice Kill the Ecumenical Movement, ed. Stephen C. Rose (Risk - Vol. III, No. 1&2, 1967), p. 69.

²Bultmann, History, p. 155.

CHAPTER V

AREND TH. VAN LEEUWEN - CHRISTIANITY IN WORLD HISTORY

Dr. van Leeuwen's book has been chosen for this thesis because it has had a very influential impact on modern day theologians. Colin Williams says that writers like van Leeuwen, van Peursen, Cox, etc. have revolted against the medieval terminology of Christianity. The very secularization which has been regarded over the years as an enemy of the faith is now interpreted as the result of the Christian faith. This secularization came about by the Christian faith overcoming the Greek spatial view of reality which had gained an upper hand in medieval Christendom.

For these writers, secular--pointing to the world of time--becomes a word to be rehabilitated, not as a saviour word, for secularization as such will certainly not save the world, but as a word that points to the world of time where God is at work and where we are called to be free to join him where the action is.¹

The theme of this chapter will be secularization and the Christian Gospel in the world. Van Leeuwen states clearly that Christianity has nurtured the secularization of the West.

Dr. van Leeuwen defines secularization as the process in which man is freed from religious constraints. Man, thereby, is free to use his potential to the full and find his destiny in his time and history unencumbered by any shackles. Secularism is the pattern or system of thought involving the non-religious or secular (of this world of time) elements of Western civilization such as modern technology, science, democracy, capitalism, socialism and nationalism. These are the fruits of the Christian influence says van Leeuwen.

¹Colin Williams, Faith in a Secular Age (Great Britain: Clear-Type Press, 1966), p. 38.

Secularism reorganizes society on a new non-religious basis and the man of this society is the "fourth man." This man is non-religious. He is a secular man free from any religious constraints. In fact, his self and world view has little understanding of the religious perspective. None of this thinking is incompatible with the spirit of the Christian Gospel message, van Leeuwen maintains. Christians have had the attitude that they must combat secularism and materialism as Christianity's enemies. The overall purpose of his book is to combat this attitude.

Van Leeuwen examines, in his book, the relationship between the Western civilization and Christianity. He says that the modern expansion of the West is a unique phenomenon in history. The religious and non-religious aspects of a civilization have never been so loosely interconnected as with the expansion of Christianity and the spread of Western civilization. Non-Western countries have implemented programmes of Westernization to a great extent but generally speaking, there is an open aversion to Christianization. Van Leeuwen feels that this very process of distinction and emancipation from religious constraints, which is secularization, is a product of Western Christian civilization. The non-religious elements of Western civilization, like modern technology, science, democracy, capitalism, socialism, nationalism, which have been welcomed into Western life, have been driven forward by the dynamic spirit of Christianity. Van Leeuwen asks:

Could it be that in modern Western civilization Christianity is 'submerged,' that it is coming now to the non-Western nations in the guise of secularism and incognito, so to speak?¹

Today the Western domination of the world is coming to an end. The Asian peoples have won their independence and the process of emancipation in Africa keeps that continent in a state of ferment. Van Leeuwen points out, to further his argument, that it seems sig-

¹Arend Th. van Leeuwen, Christianity in World History: The Meeting of the Faiths of East and West (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1964), p. 16.

nificant that the impasse in the Christian missionary enterprise and the end of the period of Western dominance have come about together. Although the period of Western domination is ending, van Leeuwen states that the impact of Western civilization on the non-Western world has only just entered the first phase.

Theological propositions are being put forth now in this area. Thus Lesslie Newbigin,¹ in some outline notes for a Biblical approach to modern history, said that:

What is happening now . . . is that the peoples who have no history are being drawn into the history of which the centre is Jesus Christ; and that is the only history . . . The ferment of change which arises from the impact upon ancient cultures of the Gospel, or at least of the kind of life which has its origin, within Christendom, is the force which is giving irreversible direction to that which was static or merely cyclical.²

Van Leeuwen would support this proposition to a certain extent, in that he feels that where the Christian Gospel or influence is felt, there arises an atmosphere for the Church to breathe in, and the first principles of a "Christian civilization."

The impact of the West he feels goes from strength to strength; it is the dynamic factor behind the awakening of the non-Western world; it supplies the backbone of world history in the present age.³

One almost senses in van Leeuwen the influence of Toynbee's philosophy of history. Toynbee saw Christianity as the heir and culmination of all religions. Christianity in Toynbee's system was the ever new and greatest event of human history. It would some day possibly unify all of history for it was history's main hope.⁴ The Western civilization, and all that it makes possible, opens the door to participation of all men in one world, van Leeuwen feels. Christianity is the elan vital which will open to all men

¹Dr. Newbigin has been an official in the World Council of Churches for many years as well as a bishop of the Church of South India.

²Van Leeuwen, World, p. 17.

³Van Leeuwen, World, p. 20.

⁴Rudolf Bultmann, History and Eschatology, p. 88.

the possibilities of all history. Certainly, van Leeuwen does not carry this thought to the extent that Toynbee did in thinking of an establishment of a world Christian civilization.

The tremendous changes that are taking place in the modern world have made more and more people conscious of the fact that we have come to the end of an epoch. The despair of many and the abyss that many see opening, which we talked of in the last two chapters, is brought about by this consciousness. Van Leeuwen says this awareness of historical patterns comes from the sense of time and history which runs in the very bloodstream of Western civilization.

It springs from the paradoxical conviction that the 'fulness of time' refers to the end of the ages and yet has made its appearance in the midst of history so that it is 'between the times' that we now live, looking back to the fulness which is yet to come, expecting the coming of him whom we proclaim to be the historical man of Nazareth.¹

Our modern age, however, seemed bent on emancipating itself from the power of the eschatological expectation. That is, van Leeuwen contends, until the present century announces once more the "decline of the West" and the possibility of an end to history. The growth of knowledge and power brought our society face to face with historical boundaries which could not be denied. So modern man finds himself without a hopeful prospect in the realm of time and space. We live in a "planetary world," van Leeuwen asserts, that is limited and finite. It is the expansion of the West that has made ours a planetary world.

It is in the West that a civilization liberates itself--and with itself all other civilizations--from provincialism and self-perpetuation and comes to grips with the question of the future of mankind.²

This question of coming to grips with the future of mankind is one that secular man is very interested in and one which Bultmann

¹Van Leeuwen, World, p. 399.

²Van Leeuwen, World, p. 400.

could not seem to answer directly. The particular dynamic and spirit of Christianity is very tied up in this question.

The modern technological revolution is the outcome of a unique course of civilization in the West, in which clearly discernible spiritual motives and a particular view of God, man and the world have played a decisive part.¹

This technological revolution is most significant to the world's future and is changing the character of every area of our world.

One result of this change is that a new type of man is emerging.² The modern technological revolution is part of a larger revolutionary process which is uprooting and destroying what up to now has been the cornerstone of all human society: religion. Van Leeuwen wonders whether the present technological revolution does not confront Christianity for the first time in history with the crucial question:

. . .whether the 'fulness of time,' which makes all things new, does not involve a revolution in man's outlook and relation to his fellow men and to the world, in so far as that can be said to fall within the technological dimension?³

The history of Israel in Biblical times centered around the temple. The New Testament proclaims that in Christ, the crucified Lord, the Temple is done away with, for it was another tower of Babel. Van Leeuwen points out that in the centuries that followed, Christianity once more made herself temples and could not give fitting expression to the Cross. Now at last, in the rise of modern technology, the way is opened for a new pattern to break through with forceful power, pushing the Temple once and for all from its central place. Christians have been realizing this more and more as can be seen today in its emphasis on small group encounters and studies, service in and to the world and in its de-emphasis on large buildings and financing.

¹Van Leeuwen, World, p. 401.

²Van Leeuwen, World, p. 401. He is the fourth man. See thesis p. 85.

³Van Leeuwen, World, p. 402.

Van Leeuwen sees an even greater change, however. The more this revolution works and penetrates, the more the structure of society changes. Religion can generally accommodate itself to changes and even strengthen its position eventually. Yet such a religion will inevitably find the new type of "fourth man" springing up in its midst and for him religion as such is a total loss. In so far as religion comes to terms with the technological revolution, it will find itself having no control of the direction in which the revolution is going. This revolution in van Leeuwen's eyes has the property to destroy the roots of religion.

Perhaps too, this discovery is in store for it [religion] because it must pay the heavy price of its own lethargy and conservatism and make way for a fully fledged technocratic ideology which can no longer find any excuse for religion.¹

Van Leeuwen maintains that the Gospel is neither "secular" nor "religious," but it is essentially historical because it declares an eschatological message of a "fullness of time" which is within history. Through the form of the technological revolution to which Christianity gave birth, Christian history is becoming world history. In Harvey Cox's book The Secular City, the secular life tends to become identified with the Kingdom of God.² Van Leeuwen is quick to point out that this technocratic era is not the Kingdom of God, but it is not the Kingdom of Satan either. Rather, it is a phase of history where the Lord and Satan are both at work. The Gospel is not to be confused with Christian history, for the Gospel proclaims the close of the ages, but it is not to be divorced from history. Where this Gospel is preached, there one will find Christianization, van Leeuwen maintains. The event [preaching] itself presents them neither with Jesus Christ nor with Satan.

¹Van Leeuwen, World, p. 404.

²Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 116. The Biblical image of the Kingdom of God is transcribed for our time into the symbol of the secular city.

What they do encounter in it, through a process of torrential change, is the full power of Western civilization, ambiguous, dangerous, emancipating and enslaving, renewing and destroying, welcomed and yet feared, good and evil. In the midst of this encounter the Church has to stand and 'interpret,' until this invading history is no longer suffered as a blind process, a glorious or a pernicious fatality, but men come at last to understand what the voices which speak to them through that history are saying and they learn to distinguish between the voice of Christ and those of his counterfeits.¹

Through van Leeuwen's book we are told we are in a new phase of Christian history. This is a significant thought that men in the modern world, Christian or non-Christian, should take to heart. Christians cannot look back with longing for a restoration of the "Corpus Christianum" nor for a re-Christianization of our civilization. We are beginning a new epoch with the development of a new "non-religious" or secular man. The foundations and standards of measure of the past epoch can no longer be used. It would seem that the great frustrations felt by many within the Church arise from the fact that they are looking backward longingly, and trying to apply and use the worn-out measures of a bygone era. The frustration and despair of the man outside the Church may arise from his loss of the Church's temple pillar as a whipping boy or at least a peg for his actions and decisions. It seems that men today, Christian and non-Christian, are standing on a common basis in the technological era, and facing the implications of secular society stripped of its religious boundaries and gateways and filled with its insecurity and uncertainties. Men are one and the world is quickly becoming one, or a "global village" in Marshall McLuhan's terms. So long as the Church remains in the clutch of this outmoded thinking of a "Corpus Christianum":

. . . she will not meet the onslaught of modern 'secularist' forces with the Gospel of a new heaven and a new earth, but will go on clinging to obsolete positions which the course of Christian history has already reduced to rubble and which cannot survive the judgment of God.²

¹Van Leeuwen, World, p. 409.

²Van Leeuwen, World, p. 411.

This same sort of bygone thinking of a past era permeates Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Dr. van Leeuwen is quite adamant in pointing out that it is a fallacy of thinking that Christianity should form a common front with the other religions of the world in combatting secularism and atheism. This has a great appeal in Western countries and mesmerizes thousands of honest Christian people.¹ Other religions welcome this. Van Leeuwen feels the approach and spirit of the great religions are incompatible and very out of date. The next era belongs to Christian history and its Gospel will dominate and influence world history. This will happen in van Leeuwen's opinion because secularization is an inevitable fact of modern life and it is the child of Christianity.

A confrontation with the non-Christian religions will not touch at the root of modern man's problems unless it is preceded and prepared for:

. . . in the revealing light of the Word of God. The creative activity of God's word exposes the religion of the Gentiles as nihil, 'nothingness.'²

Van Leeuwen sees in this approach to the religions a parallel to the tower of Babel approach. The non-Christian religions are trying to build a top, but the tower has no top. It is not the business of Christianity to provide that top nor to try and show non-Christians that the top they are trying to build largely resembles a Christian one and Christians will be able to add the finishing touch. This I think is what lies behind the frustrated questions of Western man who looks for a meaning in history. The meaning he is hoping to find is that Christianity can and will provide the top to the tower or at least the finishing touches. The eschatological meaning for man and history will then be known.

Van Leeuwen is telling us there is no top to the tower man

¹Van Leeuwen, World, p. 411. This is one of the most seductive ideas in Moral Re-Armament.

²Van Leeuwen, World, p. 416.

is building. The point of encounter between Christian and non-Christian religions lies at the base or in cooperation in building a city and a tower--cooperation in building. Christians can have the opportunity to see, understand and appreciate their non-Christian fellows. Van Leeuwen then, is not opposed to dialogue and understanding with non-Christians but he is concerned over approach and attitude that it is not based on anti-secular and anti-atheistic materialism. Christianity should make common cause with all those movements and individuals who wish to promote liberty.

That is, liberation from the fetters of 'sacred' tradition, together with the renewal of society in the direction of a truly secular and man-made order of life.¹

It is a little confusing and misleading to hear van Leeuwen talk of the "Christianization" of the non-Western world. In a nutshell, he means not the conversion of the world to Christian religious society but involving people in the onward movement of Christian history. The preaching of the gospel takes place as a basic part of that expanding history. At the same time, it gives the freedom of decision and the eschatological outlook which drive it onward and deliver it from the curse of ideologies. The gospel will be concerned not with the survival of religion, but simply with the future of man. The influence of the gospel will cause the non-Western, non-Christian world, to:

. . . re-orientate itself by the example of Christian history and along the same lines²

. . . conducting man to global unity and peace.³

Van Leeuwen's thought has certainly faced the second part of the question that this thesis was concerned with: Does world history have any meaning? Bultmann and Niebuhr have a more personal concern with meaning for the individual. Van Leeuwen is concerned about the world scene: Christianity, the Church, the modern age,

¹Van Leeuwen, World, p. 420.

²Van Leeuwen, World, p. 422.

³Van Leeuwen, World, p. 431.

technology, the non-Christian world, Western civilization. However, van Leeuwen does not suggest any concrete answers for us. His system of thought is facing the whole issue of the modern age and secularization. This is an area which our writer sees as being in the process of evolving. We are in between significant epochs in history. An old age is passing and a new age is coming. Van Leeuwen sees the necessity of going in certain directions and maintaining certain attitudes. He almost seems to be thinking aloud; but very loud. One can sense through the pages of his book, a stirring, an awakening and I think, a hope.

Certainly van Leeuwen is challenging Christianity to realize its great responsibility. History today does have meaning for Christianity, a vital meaning. This is a meaning for mankind in history. This meaning is for all men, but van Leeuwen stresses it is based on the Christian philosophy of history. This meaning is that man can find himself as a part of society and in his modern world history through the freeing, creating, dynamic of the Gospel of Christ. The life force or spirit of the Gospel brings about a revolutionary change in man's outlook and relations with his fellow man and the world. Man today must see himself not as part of the Christian Church but as part of a world community of God's children knowing and realizing the potential of his humanity and that of his brothers. In the final analysis, it would seem that the important decision for man is the decision of faith in the person of Christ. The comprehensive task of the Church is to bring the whole Gospel to the whole world. That provides a genuinely eschatological perspective of the meaning and purpose of history (which is the search of this thesis), for the "wholeness" spoken of here is the wholeness related to the "end of the ages." Van Leeuwen's approach has a fully historical perspective.

Possibly we can find a tie here with Bultmann's thought. Bultmann sees in the present moment of decision a possibility for human fulfillment. This means action is taken. Van Leeuwen stresses a comprehensive approach for the Church in her missionary task of serving her Lord amidst the needs of a rapidly changing world.

Under this approach, evangelization is cure of sick bodies, of broken down, inefficient and eroded farms, of illiteracy, of insufficient and unbalanced diet, unsanitary homes, impure drinking water, of a subsistence level of existence, of filthy villages, of the moral, mental and spiritual stagnation of corrupt practices and conditions. Every effort upon this wide and comprehensive front of Christian service is a part of the Evangel [Good news] and is required to enable the individual to reach the fulness of the stature which is in Christ.¹

The period of Western missionary activity overseas is drawing to a close. For Van Leeuwen this means that now the "whole Church" throughout the world must take over the full responsibility for the vision, the dynamic initiative and the historical task which up to now the Western missions have been carrying out.

Van Leeuwen gives few answers but he asks many questions, stirs much thought and issues demanding challenges. The "fourth man," the secular man, is now facing us with his questions. Are we facing him with ours? For after all we are no different; between us there is no barrier, our world is the same. The only difference lies in our perspective. We stand in the world with Jesus Christ who has freed us to our true manhood. We can see further too for we can see we are part of a "fulness of time." We are freed to find in the existential moments of the Now, God, ourselves and others. Arend Th. van Leeuwen has pointed us beyond ourselves and faced the church anew with its important mission to the world.

¹Van Leeuwen, World, p. 427.

CONCLUSION

One of Christianity's main tasks is to communicate with men. I think this statement is the key to my conclusion. The Old and New Testaments which we have briefly surveyed have as their main purpose to tell or witness to the communication of God with man and of man with man. Jesus signifies for us the supreme and fullest communication of God with man. Through Christ men are enabled to communicate fully with other men and with themselves.

The introduction stated that the concern of this thesis was what Christianity has to say to modern man about his existential question of the meaning of history. So we have asked what Christianity has to communicate with our age--the modern secular age?

In approaching this question, Christianity brings with it the traditional eschatology of its faith. Eschatology is the body of beliefs about the meaning and goal of history according to God's plan. To modern man the symbolic and mythological structure of eschatology simply does not communicate. This thesis has tried to look at this eschatological structure and see what it was intended to communicate. We have seen through our historical survey that the eschatological theme dominates when Christians are impressed by the otherness of God, as in Luther's case. Our thought today is not like this.

Our secular age is an age when man has been released from metaphysical and religious influences of the past. He has turned his focus of attention away from "other worldly" concerns to "this world." He reads the Biblical record and finds no point of contact, of this often symbolic structure, with his existential world. The writers we have looked at in this thesis have provided a great service in communication. They have, I feel, cut through the elaborate symbolic, mythological, metaphysical world view of another

age and have pointed out to us the essence of the truth to which the writers were trying to witness. I think there is a real point of contact between our age and the Biblical witness if we read their records with understanding.

Christian eschatology, the Christian concept of history need not be bewildering if we can see the message that was conveyed through the Old and the New Testaments. Looking beyond the symbolic and mythological structure we see the firm belief that God was active in history working out His purposes for man and the world. There is the abiding belief that as history had a beginning in God, so it will have an end in which God will fulfill His plan for man and history. We need not yet get involved with elaborate speculations and predictions. Christianity says emphatically that history does have a meaning and Jesus of Nazareth is the key to this meaning.

I conclude that Christianity definitely can communicate with our modern society. Its communication though must take into account the secular revolution that has engulfed our world and changed man's concepts.

Daniel Callahan makes a very significant commentary on the secular man, saying that he is pragmatic and profane (of this material world).

. . . life for him [secular man] is a set of problems, not an unfathomable mystery. He brackets off the things that cannot be dealt with and deals with those which he can. He wastes little time thinking about 'ultimate' or 'religious' questions. And he can live with highly provisional solutions.¹

This viewpoint raises a problem if we are going to speak of communication between Christianity and secular man. Callahan points out an important fact. The secular man is pragmatic. He asks questions of his present moment. He is satisfied with provisional solutions which deal adequately with his daily life. He therefore is not asking "ultimate questions" of the meaning of history and life. We

¹Daniel Callahan, The Secular City Debate (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 63.

have the problem then of whether secular man is even raising the question this thesis is concerned about.

I must draw here, what I feel is an important distinction between the ultimate and provisional questions. I feel there is some overlapping. Secular man may not be concerned with the ultimate question dealing with a transcendent realm of values and activity, but he cannot avoid the question of this thesis: the meaning of history. Even with his satisfaction with provisional solutions, these solutions seek meaning in the existential moment. This is the concern of this thesis and it is a concern that overlaps the ultimate and provisional questions and solutions. Callahan is saying that secular man asks first the questions of the meaning of his present life. In dealing with the provisional questions Christianity doesn't need to reject the transcendent realm and the ultimate questions, rather it must bracket these off-- until a man asks the ultimate questions--and answer his present questions. Christians still have a responsibility though to challenge men's thinking as Christ did.

There is a tendency to draw a strict line between religion and the secular. One senses this sharp distinction in Callahan. It is not simple. Charles West points out in de Vries' book that there has been, in the postwar world, the growth of an alliance between secularism and religion, on secularist premises. Secularism is not inherently hostile to religion as such.

As the expression of the human spirit reaching beyond itself toward wider and more complete structures of meaning, religion can have its due place in the secularist's view of life. The secularist objects to man's being confronted by a reality which enters history from outside human capacities. He objects to dogmas other than his own. But religion, and even God, understood as the depth of human reason and experience or a predicate of the human consciousness, and as an affirmation of the world in terms of it [world] is quite possible for him.¹

¹Egbert de Vries, Man in Community: Christian Concern for the Human in Changing Society (New York: Association Press, 1966), p. 337.

Rudolf Bultmann though he deals with this ultimate question of meaning, addresses the immediate questions of man. Bultmann realizes that modern man cannot understand the meaning of Biblical myths. He says that every moment in a person's life has the possibility of being the eschatological "now" when God breaks through to give a man self-knowledge and a sense of His purpose and meaning for him and history. Meaning only comes in the now of the present moment and is seen in terms of today's encounter with the neighbor and our relationships of love. Certainly this was Jesus' emphasis. His ethic was one of immediacy for he stressed that a man must choose for or against God now, for the Kingdom was near. In fact the Kingdom had come for those who had made their decision as to whom they would follow and serve. The Old Testament stressed the immediacy of the Covenant with God too.

Bultmann says that a man cannot find meaning in the historical process of history. In fact we cannot claim to know the goal of history. Christianity today has generally repudiated its faith in historical progress. Man can only find meaning in the present moment of his life and experiences. Arend Th. van Leeuwen, however, tries to grapple with the Christian meaning in the historical process. He does not uphold the progress belief but he does stress the significance of Christianity to history and for this reason his message is important to modern man. Dr. van Leeuwen sees the secularization movement as the child of the Christian spirit and dynamic. I think he is right. Christians are people set free by Christ from all chains of superstition, fear, and sin, so that they might be free to realize their potential and manhood as sons of God. Dr. van Leeuwen says that Christianity has been freed by the process of secularization to be a "servant to the world." It has been freed to make known and to show the Incarnation which is its uniqueness and the hope for man. This is not "another worldly" concern but very much a secular concern in that secular man is confronted where he is in the world. This Incarnation, this birth of God in Christ is a reality which man can know in his life and this reality of the

birth of God in man is man's hope and history's hope. Secularization is not salvation but it has freed Christ from his social, institutional and cultural shackles. Christianity's mission to the world is more important than ever: a mission to serve humanity and to free men to be sons of God. Christianity has a mission to help man look deeper into life for meaning and not at the historical process. The Church is hearing this message and Christians are awakening to their work not believing that the Kingdom of God will come in the process of world history, but believing and knowing that it can begin in a person "now" and in all his relationships.

Reinhold Niebuhr speaks to the secular but with Christian realism. He says that though the Christian Gospel has a final answer to the problems of both individual life and man's total history, that does not mean it will be accepted. Here our conclusion must agree with Niebuhr; that the Gospel's acceptance is an achievement of faith through the gift of God's love and grace. The questions of the meaning of life and history do come from a point of despair as modern man, now free and standing on his own, looks around at the world and asks what it all means. Secular society can free a man but it can enslave him just as readily. The Gospel can speak to this because Christ stands above all culture and God's judgment is on all societies and systems. Niebuhr stresses that man under Christ, under God's judgment is free from false ideologies and systems of man. This situation defines the state of secular man too. Here is an important point of contact between Niebuhr and secular man.

For all our talk of the presentness of God and the freeing of man from metaphysics we still come down to the question of the transcendence of God. It is a reality to the Christian life and it cannot be bracketed off. Christ was a man of the present world but his power and strength came from the reality of God with whom he communed in prayer so often. This dimension we try to ignore in our modern secular age, but we cannot and still expect that we can be followers of Jesus. The source of strength he tapped, we cannot do without. If we do, our source of nourishment and power will dry up and we can be destroyed by our circumstances in life.

Our conclusion then might be something of a draw. Those who would put away metaphysics and all higher thoughts of the personalism of God in favor of politics, sociology and history have the attitude of modern man on their side. They are also in a better position to turn directly to human needs, not burdened with a pressing demand to work out final values and goals.

On the other hand, man is not just a political and historical creature. He does not live by social action alone. Someone has to speak to the non-historical self, that a man senses within himself. Someone has to speak especially when all of a man's hopes and plans come to nothing or when he looks death in the face. Even secular life at its best will have its nether regions. Man then cannot keep these ultimate questions forever bracketed off. Niebuhr points out that we must take the Biblical symbols of the end of history seriously, not literally, because they express the "self-transcendent character of historical existence and point to its eternal ground."¹

We have then a tension. It is a creative tension in which the Gospel stands in the midst of life, speaking to man's existential present and still keeping him in perspective. It provides a breadth for life as well as a depth. Christ exemplified for us this creative tension, for he was very much a part of this world and yet his life had a dimension that encompassed and transcended this life and its history.

We must say yes and no to secularization. The secular process in the world must be interpreted by the Gospel because secularization is not self-sustaining and needs a point of reference outside the process. The moment that we talk of a perspective outside the process, whether as a Biblical perspective or the perspective of Christ, we lose some secular men by the very definition of secular. Some secular men are self-sufficient. Their lives have no need of God. It was this sort of situation that Bonhoeffer had in

¹Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 289.

mind when he spoke of the "coming of age" of man and the need for "religionless Christianity." It is a fact of our time. But this tension of realms and perspectives is also a fact of our time. Christianity cannot exist without this tension if we really are following Christ's lead in the world.

To answer the questions of this thesis then, I say, "Yes, history does have a meaning for the modern secular age." Christianity can speak to modern man if he will listen. He may not accept it, but it is there for the grasping. Regardless of the chaos and evil and insanity of the world as we look at it today, there is a meaning. God has not lost control. He is at work still, carrying out His purposes for man and history. Men are given freedom to choose to work with Him or not. Where men are working with Him, one can see His purposes unfolding even if only in an isolated village in India or in a little tenement room in Vancouver or in a shack in Edmonton.

In summary then, there is only one reference point to the answer Christianity gives to modern secular man and it is the reference point of all Christian thought from the Gospel times through to today; it is Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God began His fulfillment of history in which man's purpose would be made known and history completed. Today, however, we must communicate to modern man the presentness of Christ. The Gospel records of Jesus' life amply show this emphasis. Christ struggled and groped, laughed and cried, dreamed and acted, prayed and lived, talked and ate, sweated and rested, with men in his day. He also walked and talked and served his Father. Christ taught love and showed this love in his life and in doing so enabled many to find and experience the fullness of life in the midst of life and its evil. This is the answer to the question of the meaning of history. His message is one for this world, so it is a secular message. This world was important to him. He changed men's lives for present living that they might know and live with the Father now, as he lived with the Father now. To Jesus there

was no separation of the sacred and secular worlds but rather an awareness in this world of a further dimension of life. On this basis he was willing to be nailed on a Cross so that love's key to the meaning of all existence and history might be turned. He died only to live more powerfully and fully than he had ever lived in his physical existence. He opened up to all men for all time the living awareness of the full dimension to life which men can find now on earth by living as sons of God, serving the present moment of humanity knowing that they are upheld in the present moment by his presence and strength. Beyond this nothing else matters. We have beyond this a promise of eternal life, but we must accept it by faith if we can. If we can't, we still have our commission to love in the now of modern secular life. In the Agape (Love) of God in Christ, man's existence and all history are fulfilled.

Behold the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you but you must be born again to see it. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to speak to you now in your secular world and through my people who serve me in your world. We are preaching Good News to the poor and telling of release for the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. We are here to set free the oppressed and to announce the year when the Lord will save His people. This has all come true. God is fulfilling men and history.¹

Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come . . . God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. Behold now is the day of salvation.²

¹Paraphrase of Luke 4:16-21 and Luke 17:21.

²II Cor. 5:17,19,20 and II Cor. 6:2.

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